LETTERS FROM EUROPE FROCH-KESSLER II

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FRONT & CENTER

BERNARD HOPKINS EMERGED FROM THE SHADOWS TO CLAIM OVERDUE REWARDS

JOHNATHON BANKS

THE HEAVYWEIGHT RODE AN EMOTIONAL ROLLER COASTER

ARTURO GATTI

'THUNDER' MIGHT NOT HAVE HAD GREAT TALENT BUT HE HAD 'IT'

6-YEAR-OLD MIRACLES

EDWIN RODRIGUEZ'S TWINS FOUGHT FOR THEIR LIVES . . . AND WON

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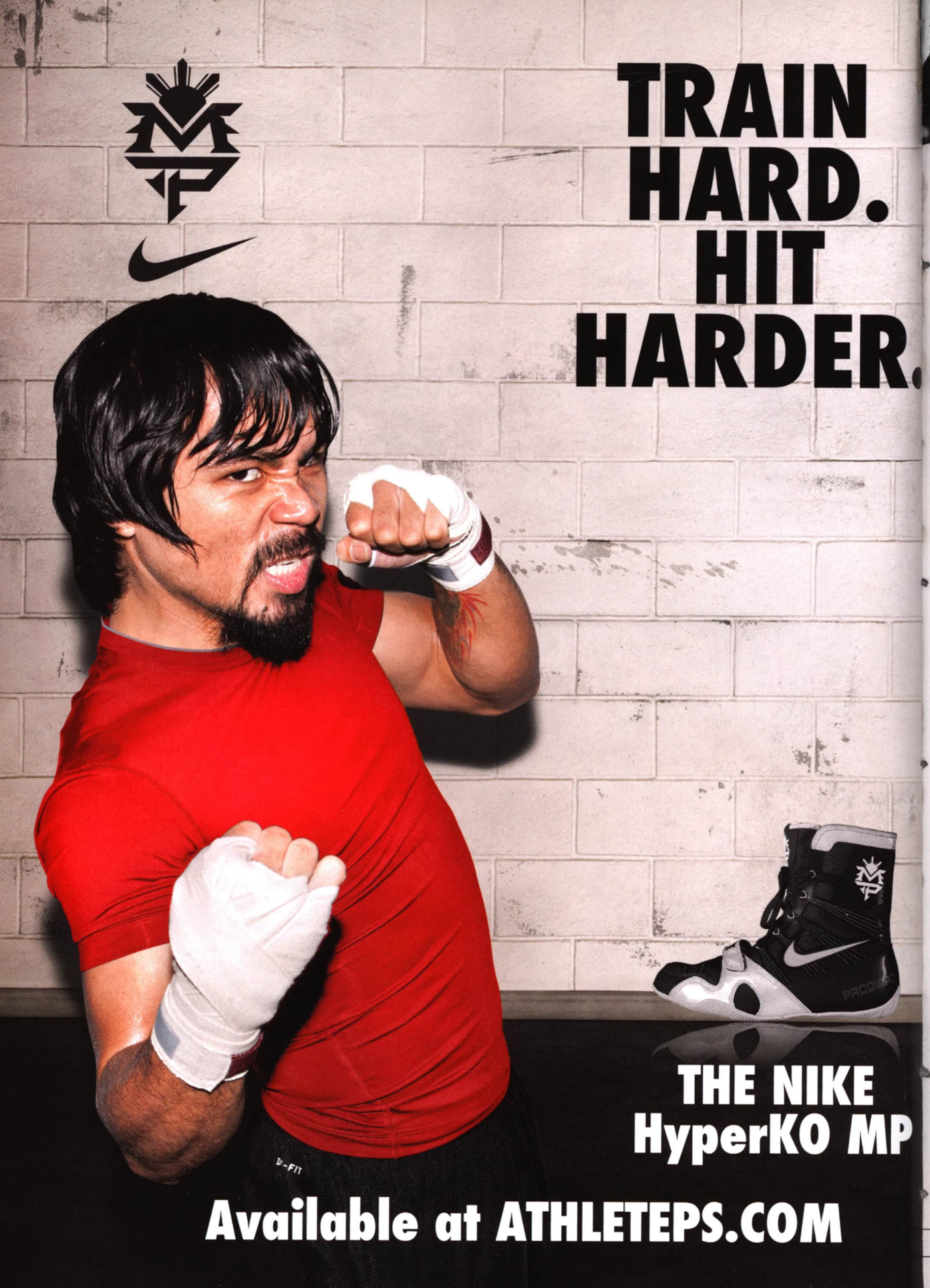
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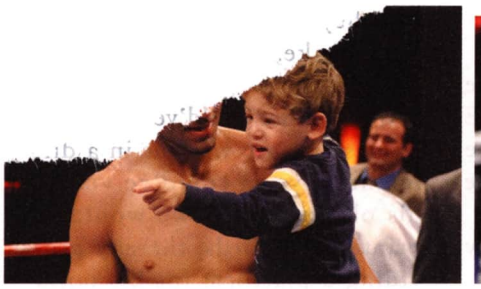

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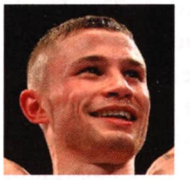

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TAVORIS CLOUD CONFIDENT
IBF TITLEHOLDER WANTS TO SHUT UP BERNARD HOPKINS.
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HOPKINS VS. DON KING?
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CAN WE TA...

By: **Michael Rosenthal**

The vast majority of feature stories that appear in THE RING Magazine include the voice – meaning quotes – of the subject. Some don't.

The cover story of the February 2013 issue was about Floyd Mayweather Jr., who refused to talk to veteran correspondent Bernard Fernandez at least in part because the magazine had him and Manny Pacquiao tied atop our pound-for-pound ratings for a time.

For this issue, Tim Smith, another respected boxing writer, tried for weeks to get Tim Bradley on the phone for a story but was unsuccessful. Bradley evidently feels he wasn't treated fairly by the media after his controversial victory over Pacquiao.

We ultimately ran a story without Bradley's voice.

Of course, we have no recourse. Our contributors do what they can with amenable sources and then move on to the next story. What else could we do?

The reluctance (refusal?) of some fighters to work with members of the media is a shame, though. Websites like RingTV.com and publications like THE RING, as well as so many other quality outlets, are an important link between the fighters and the public.

The fans thirst for interesting stories about their favorite fighters and responsible journalists strive to accommodate them. Stars such as Mayweather and Bradley will continue to reap great rewards whether or not th..., no mistake, cheated.

Mayweather could've his displeasure with us in a di... ferent way; he could've voiced his objection and we would've printed his words, thereby providing a platform for his point of view.

If Bradley felt he was betrayed by the media after the Pacquiao fight, he might've been served by expressing his disappointment publicly. If he had, everyone might've looked at the fight differently.

In other words, tell us if we're being unfair and we'll provide the opportunity to give your side of the story. You'll be served, we'll be served and, most important, the fans will be served.

Many fighters and others in the boxing business won't believe this but most reporters aren't out to get them. We simply want to stay on top of the news and write good stories, the kind of stories we hope will touch readers in some way.

Our primary motivation is not to draw more eyes to our publications and websites; we're not businessmen, we're journalists. We also provide free publicity for all the fight cards. That's why the biggest promoters make the time to speak to us on a regular basis.

And, believe it or not, we love the sport as much as anyone – probably more than many given that we're not driven by profits. Bottom line: We're all in this thing together. It's too bad we can't always *work* together. ■

...ischer
(1888-1972)

EDITOR
Michael Rosenthal

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Douglass Fischer

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
Brian Harty

ART DIRECTOR
Sharon Kaplan

COVER DESIGN
ANYONE™ COLLECTIVE

RING CARD GIRLS CONTRIBUTOR
Heather Shanholtz

CONTROLLER
Deborah L. Harrison

CIRCULATION DIRECTOR
Kenneth J. Gudaitis

ADVERTISING INQUIRIES
Robert Gasparri
213-233-2952
sepub@sepublications.com

SUBSCRIPTION INQUIRIES
SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT PUBLICATIONS
P.O. BOX 433122
Palm Coast, FL 32164-3122
1-800-846-6438
thering@emailcustomerservice.com

BACK ISSUES
215-643-3087 OR ONLINE AT RINGTV.COM

DIGITAL EDITION INQUIRIES
support@imirus.com

SEND EDITORIAL COMMENTS TO:
comeoutwriting@sepublications.com
or P.O. BOX 251753,
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HEELS OVER HEAD: Joe Joyce of the British Lionhearts celebrates his victory over Avery Gibson of the USA Knockouts during a World Series of Boxing match Jan. 17 in London. The WSP features 12 franchises from around the world that compete against one another in a team format. The participants can earn money but maintain their amateur status.
Image: Scott Heavey-Getty

FLATTENED: Mikey Garcia (right) put Orlando Salido down four times in a dominating performance but had to settle for a technical-decision victory after his nose was broken by a head butt Jan. 19 in New York City. Garcia won THE RING featherweight title.
Image: Naoki Fukuda

BLOOD SPORT: Gennady Golovkin (left) turned the face of Gabriel Rosado into a bloody mess but, to the surprise of many, he was unable to knock the game Philadelphian off his feet on Jan. 19. Rosado's cornermen threw in the towel in the seventh round.
Image: Naoki Fukuda

NOT FIT FOR TV

Boxing has got to do a better job when picking fights that will be televised if they want to attract new viewers and keep the current fans awake. On the weekend of Jan. 11 and 12, the televised bouts (with the exception of the John Molina-Dannie Williams fight) had no business being on TV. And the promoters and TV stations would've known this if they looked into the boxers' pasts. The last bout of the ESPN2 telecast featured an MMA fighter named Joshua Montoya (who had no clue) against a crude, inexperienced kid named Eduardo Dominguez in a bout that was so bad I turned it off. Then I flipped to Showtime and we get Brandon Quarles using Daquan Arnett like a blocking sled all night, followed by Rico Ramos running all night from Ronny Rios. The next night, on Fox Deportes, the main event was Johan Perez vs. Steve Forbes in a fight that had no meaning and was painful to watch. These bouts were so bad that if I were watching the sport for the first time, I'd probably never watch it again. C'mon guys. Only the best action boxers should be on TV.

Robert Casazza
Staten Island, N.Y.

BASILIO BEING BASILIO

In 2009 I was in Rochester, N.Y., for a boxing card. I saw Carmen Basilio and asked him for a picture. As we were waiting, he backhanded me in my nose with an open hand. He said, "That's for being tall." I had a small tear in my eye. That was so cool. Rest in peace, Mr. Basilio.

Paul M. Sotack
Buffalo, N.Y.

DEVALUED 'MONEY'?

Can somebody please explain to me why Floyd Mayweather Jr. is rated at the top of the pound-for-pound lists? If Mayweather is half as good as he claims to be, he would be challenging himself like the great fighters he constantly berates. If he is so much better than Sugar Ray Leonard was, then he should do what Leonard did. When Leonard cleaned out the welterweight division, he moved all the way up to light heavyweight and knocked out Donny Lalonde for the title and then moved "down" to middleweight to beat Marvin Hagler, the undisputed middleweight champion. This is the one thing all great fighters had in common, from Robinson to Duran to Hearns to Leonard. They were never afraid to move up two or three weight classes to challenge themselves.Personally, I wouldn't shell out one dollar of my hard earned money to see Mayweather fight another Tommy Tomato Can. I mean, Victor Ortiz ... really? So please "Money," stop boring us true fight fans with your immature antics and take a chance or two. I'm sure Andre Ward, Sergio Martinez or even Gennady Golovkin or Saul Alvarez would love to hear from you.

Bob Smith
Kingston, N.Y.

'PERFECT PUNCH' REVISTED

After watching Juan Manuel Marquez hit Manny Pacquiao with a near "perfect punch" on Dec. 8, 2012, it reminded me of Rocky Marciano's right to the head of Jersey Joe Walcott on Sept. 23, 1952. Times have changed outside the ring, but some things will never change inside the ring.

Stephen Gardella
Brockton, Mass.

ELLIS FOR HALL?

I would not normally suggest former heavyweight titleholder Jimmy Ellis as a candidate for the International Boxing Hall of Fame, but considering who else they have let in, I think it's worth taking a look at. Ellis beat everyone who was put in front him in the heavyweight elimination tournament; therefore, he won the title in a much more legitimate way than hall of famer Ken Norton. Ellis beat some very good fighters, including Leotis Martin, Oscar Bonavena, Jerry Quarry, Floyd Patterson and George Chuvalo. I'm not putting the following fighters down. Obviously, they accomplished some noteworthy things. But if you look at the wins on the records of hall of famers Nicolino Loche, Duilio Loi, Barry McGuigan, Daniel Zaragoza and Ingemar Johansson, they are not as impressive as those of Jimmy Ellis.

Tom Parrott
Middletown, Conn.

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Image: Al Bello-Getty

Saul "Canelo" Alvarez might be wise to stay clear of Austin Trout and maintain his focus on Floyd Mayweather Jr.

CANELO SHOULD KEEP HIS EYE ON THE PRIZE

By: **David Greisman**

Fighters are called cowards when they duck a tough opponent in favor of a bout that will get them more money. And fighters are labeled fools when they step into the ring with a foe who could spoil a sizable payday against a future opponent.

Too often we damn them no matter what they do, and then too often we are damned because of what they do. We can't have it both ways. We can't be disappointed in Canelo Alvarez if he doesn't fight Austin Trout prior to getting the biggest paycheck of his career against Floyd Mayweather Jr. Nor can we deride Alvarez if he decides to battle Trout, potentially endangering said paycheck.

That decision will likely have been made by the time these words are printed. That decision will likely see Alvarez opting for short-term physical safety in favor of long-term fiscal security.

Alvarez has watched from ringside as two more big fights fell through, bringing forth what's been called the Canelo Curse: Victor Ortiz lost out on a chance to meet Alvarez after he was upset by Josesito Lopez, and Miguel Cotto's loss to Trout has made a potential Canelo-Cotto clash much less marketable than it otherwise would have been.

Canelo vs. Cotto could still happen, and it could still be a good fight, just as Manny Pacquiao's second match with Erik Morales still made for great entertainment despite Morales' disappointing decision loss beforehand to Zahir Raheem.

There was far less demand for Pacquiao to face Raheem. And it would be bad business for Alvarez to face Trout when he is just one win away from facing Mayweather on what would probably be a Mexican Independence Day pay-per-view extravaganza in September.

It is a sad reality of the sport. The path of least resistance is

why so many boxers are so inactive, sitting on the sidelines and waiting for the title shots and television spotlight rather than risking those rewards. We only see them in the ring four or more times a year when they are still prospects, when the purses provide less money and when the opponents pose less difficulty.

That's why Nonito Donaire's four wins in 2012 led many to see him as the Fighter of the Year. That's why Leo Santa Cruz's five victories in 11 months made him stand out in contrast to the other contenders and young titleholders who stagnate under the weight of millions of dollars, with little incentive to stay active and stay hungry.

Alvarez has shrewdly been kept away from Erislandy Lara. If his handlers are wise, they'll convince him to angle for anyone but Trout. There's no requirement in boxing to do what's right, not when the only thing that's right in boxing is doing what makes you rich.

That means it won't really matter who Alvarez faces in May — so long as he can still face Mayweather in September.

• • • • • • • • •

No one fight will save boxing, no matter what the boastful marketing said nearly six years ago for Oscar De La Hoya vs. Mayweather, and despite what the wishful thinking was over these past few years when it came to Mayweather vs. Manny Pacquiao.

No one fight will destroy boxing either.

But just as a huge fight in front of a huge audience can be good for growing the Sweet Science, a bad result in front of a significant number of viewers can prevent our niche sport from expanding its reach.

That was the case with the second fight between Tomasz Adamek and Steve Cunningham. While it was not the worst robbery of the year, it was nevertheless a bad time for a bad decision.

Controversy can amplify existing interest in future fights — see the sequel between Miguel Cotto and Antonio Margarito, the Marco Antonio Barrera-Erik Morales trilogy, and the extended rivalry between Manny Pacquiao and Juan Manuel Marquez. Those fights were meaningful because of the action that preceded them and all the more marketable because of the drama surrounding them.

The Adamek-Cunningham rematch also followed an exciting first installment. And it ended with drama, with the fighter most saw as the winner lowering his head while the man most saw as the loser was raising his fists.

This would not be so bad if we could get an Adamek-Cunningham trilogy. We won't. The marketing muscle is behind Adamek, what with his sizable fan base in Poland and with the Polish-American population, and with his future fights in the heavyweight division.

That is the storyline that gets told, and sold, to the audience that tuned in to NBC to see Cunningham beat Adamek but hear that Adamek had been awarded the decision. The number of viewers on regular American network television was much higher than that which typically watches on HBO, Showtime, ESPN2 or pay-per-view.

They turned off their TVs feeling turned off by the decision, turned off by a sport that has long had a reputation for corruption and incompetence.

The rest of us who know the sport recognize, unfortunately, that "That's boxing," as Freddie Roach said at the end of the broadcast. But we also know this sport delivers jaw-dropping highs alongside its head-shaking lows. That doesn't mean we should settle for the bad decisions that come far too often. It just means that the best moments have made and maintained our fandom.

The casual audience can have its experience ruined, however, by confounding conclusions and disappointing denouements. Movie audiences were split when it came to how *No Country for Old Men* ended. But sports fans typically have the benefit of knowing that the final score reflects what actually happened.

That's not the case in boxing. Unbelievable action will attract fans — but unbelievable results will repulse them. ■

Damned if he does and damned if he doesn't? Saul Alvarez (here beating up on Josesito Lopez) will be called a coward if he avoids Austin Trout and a fool if he fights him.
Image: Josh Hedges-Getty

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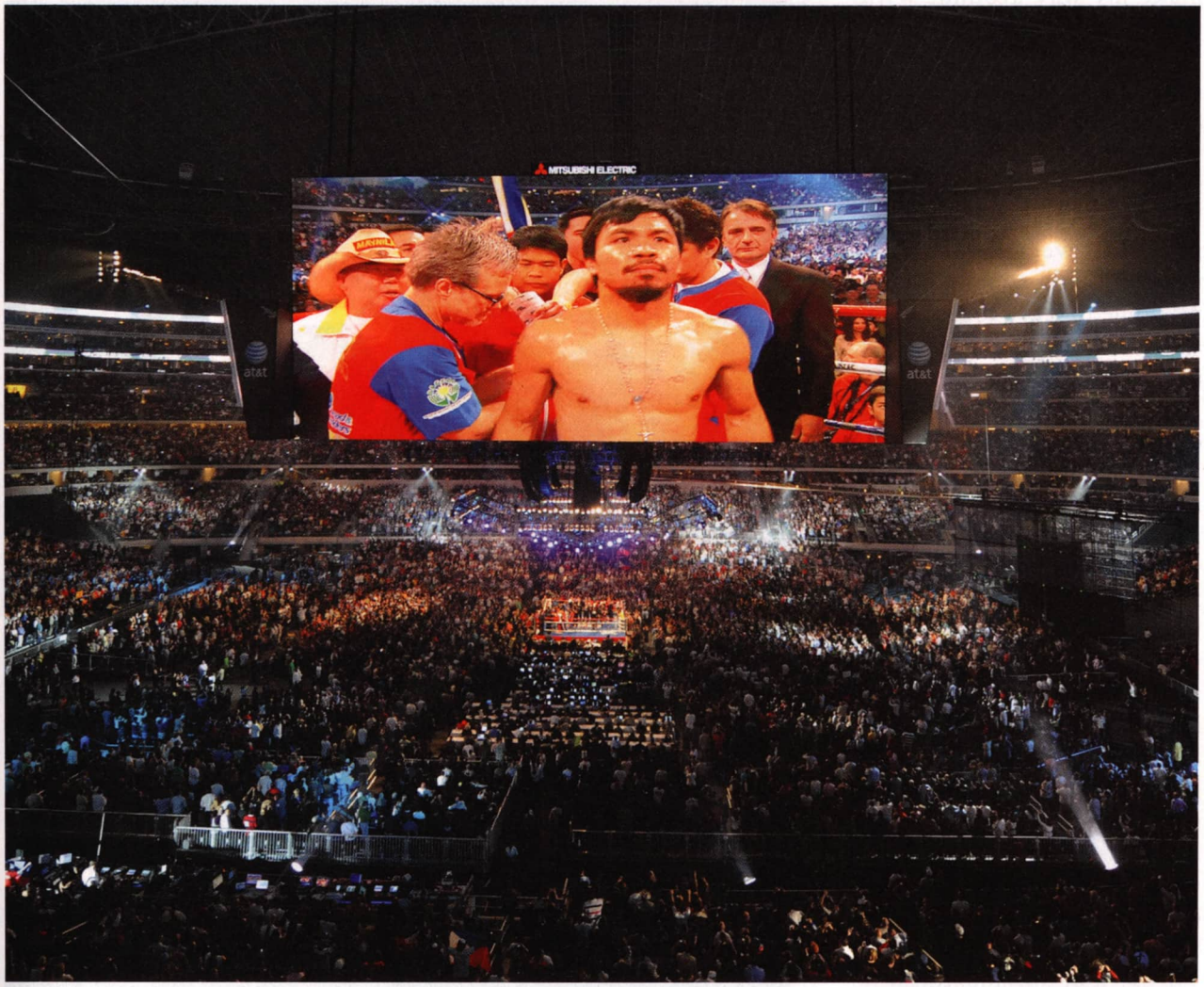


Image: Mark Ralston-Getty

Our correspondent tasted what a fighter feels when he makes his ring walk as thousands of fans go wild ... and he'll never forget it.

WALK OF A LIFETIME

By: **Thomas Hauser**

I was at ringside for eight consecutive Manny Pacquiao fights, starting with his eight-round demolition of Oscar De La Hoya in 2008. On five of those occasions, I was privileged to be in Manny's dressing room in the hours before and after the bout.

I watched Pacquiao-Marquez IV on television and, when it was over, thought back on the time I'd spent with Manny. One moment stood out on my mind.

Pacquiao fought Joshua Clottey on March 13, 2010, at Cowboys Stadium. Sports fans are familiar with the venue. It can accommodate 100,000 fans for boxing, has a retractable roof, and features an HDTV video board that's 160 feet long on each of its four sides and weighs 600 tons.

Cowboys Stadium was close to empty when I arrived for the fight a little after 5 p.m. I checked out my seat in the press section and made sure that my credential for dressing room access was in order. Then I explored the back corridors of the stadium, so I'd know how to

make my way around. With time to spare, I sat for a while with John Duddy, who was readying to fight Michael Medina on the undercard.

I was in Pacquiao's dressing room when Manny arrived at 7:50 p.m. Over the next two hours, he went through his usual pre-fight rituals. Then it was time to leave for the ring, and I ran ahead to get to my seat.

Through the subterranean depths of Cowboys Stadium ... toward the tunnel that led into the ...

Omigod!

The stadium had been a drab florescent gray with a few hundred people milling about when I'd arrived at 5. Now a tunnel lined by Dallas Cowboys cheerleaders – sexual icons of our time – lay ahead. Beyond them, tens of thousands of fans were screaming. Music blared. Spotlights moved back and forth, casting everything in a silver otherworldly glow.

It was a bit intimidating.

I walked into the tunnel.

Then I said to myself, "Hauser, you've never been in a situation like this before and you'll never be in a situation like this again. So enjoy it for what it is."

The cheerleaders were bouncing up and down, their pom-poms and a lot more shaking. The crowd grew louder in anticipation of the fighters' ring entrance. Strobe lights flashed on and off.

As I walked through the tunnel, I said to myself, "This is how it feels to be the greatest fighter in the world."

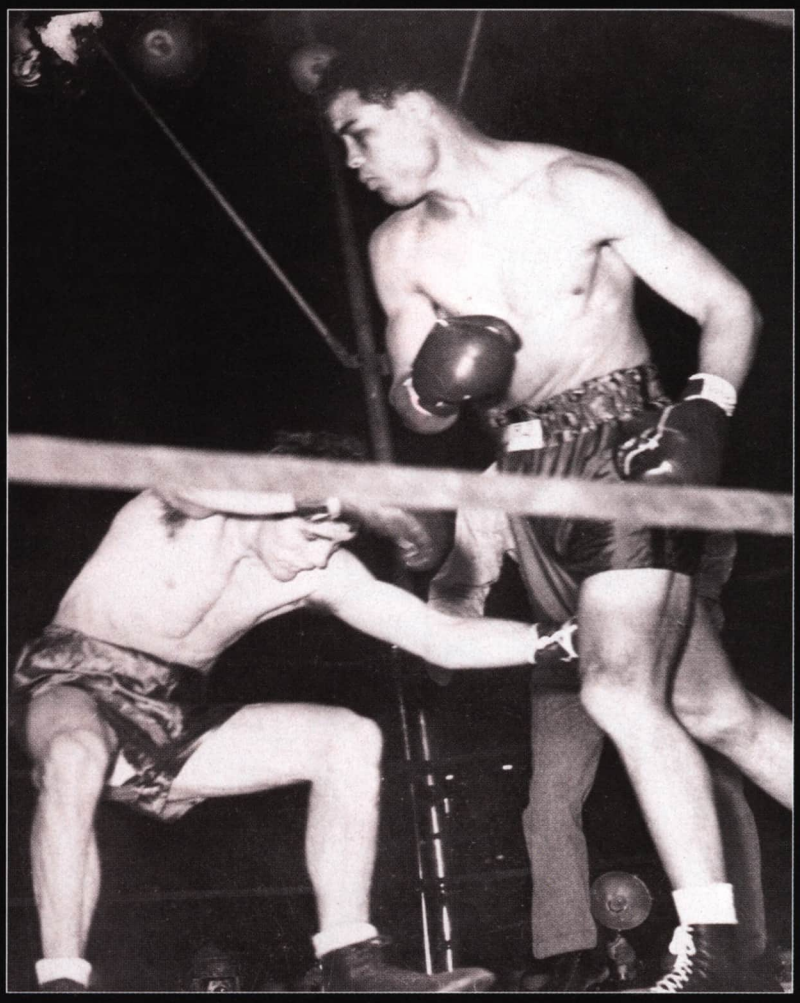


Image: THE RING

The fighter on the left was able to run but not hide when he fought Joe Louis.

QUICK QUIZ

1. Which writer called Joe Louis' fourth-round knockout of Max Baer in 1935 "the most disgusting public spectacle outside of a hanging that your correspondent ever witnessed"?

2. Which opponent said that Joe Louis' jab felt "like someone jammed an electric bulb in your face and busted it"?

3. Who felt Joe Louis' biceps and proclaimed, "We need muscles like yours to beat Germany"?

4. Before which fight did Joe Louis say of his opponent, "He can run, but he can't hide"?

Image: Courtesy of Steve Farhood

Broadcaster Steve Farhood's (right) greatest moment in sports outside boxing took place on a paddle tennis court.

GREATEST MOMENT IN SPORTS ... OUTSIDE OF BOXING

BROADCASTER STEVE FARHOOD

I've been very involved in paddle tennis since I was in my teens. There are courts in the building complex that I've lived in since I was in junior high school. I love the game.

Paddle tennis is basically tennis. The difference is that you play with a paddle instead of a racket; the court is about one-third the size of a regulation tennis court; the ball, which is a regular tennis ball, is punctured with a needle to deaden it, and you serve underhand.

In 1981, when I was 24 years old, I played in the United States Paddle Tennis Association men's national doubles championship tournament. A friend named Dave Diamond was my partner. There were about 20 teams in the tournament. Dave and I were underdogs in every match, but we played well and made it to the semi-finals. We were massive underdogs in that one, but we were in a zone. We won in straight sets. It was the best we'd ever played.

JABS & STRAIGHT WRITES

By Thomas Hauser

That was on a Saturday morning. After the match, I got on a plane and flew to Boston to cover Marvin Hagler beating Vito Antoufermo at Boston Garden. Then I flew back to New York on Sunday for the tournament finals that afternoon.

In the finals, we played two guys from Brooklyn, Sol Hauptman and Jeff Fleitman. To give you an idea of what our chances were, Sol and Jeff won the national doubles championship 13 of the 14 years that they entered the tournament together. They're the greatest team to ever play the game. And Sol won 10 more doubles championships with other partners.

Dave and I were the local boys and the crowd was rooting for us, but we were out of our league. Before the finals started, we told ourselves that we had to hold serve. If we could just hold serve in every game, good things might happen. Then we lost our first service game at love, which wasn't a good start. One of the things I remember about the match was, whenever Sol or Jeff made a mistake, the other would curse at him in Yiddish. They beat us 6-2, 6-3, 6-4.

Losing to Sol and Jeff is as much of a highlight for me as winning the semi-finals. Sol is a legend, and I had the privilege of playing against him. Later, Sol moved to Southern California and taught paddle tennis to people like Wilt Chamberlain and Barbra Streisand. Word has it that he once shouted at Streisand, "Get your tuchus [behind] to the net!"

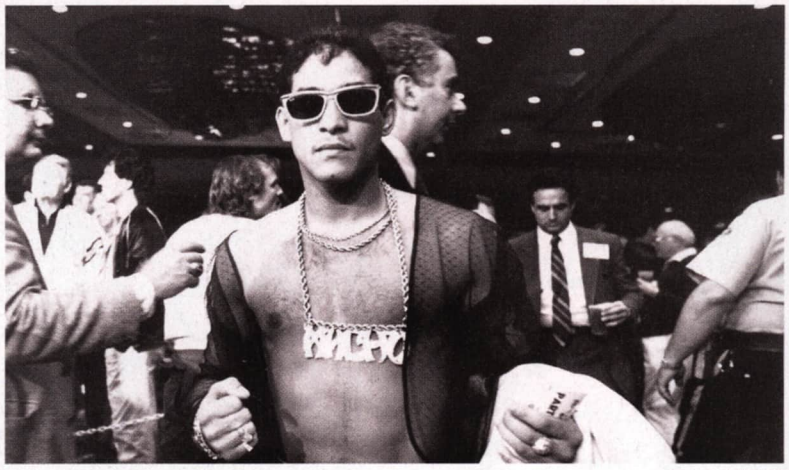


Image: THE RING

An elevator operator named Ivan who works in the building I live in told me a story recently. When he was 10 years old, his mother came back from visiting relatives in Puerto Rico. While she was waiting in the baggage claim area for her luggage, a crazy man jumped on the luggage carousel, started dancing and gyrated his way through several 360-degree turns of the carousel. Then the crazy man picked up his luggage and left.

A week or so later, Ivan was watching a Hector Camacho fight on television when his mother came into the room and pointed at the screen.

"That's the crazy guy from the airport," she said.

QUIZ ANSWERS:

1. Ernest Hemingway.

2. James Braddock, after Louis knocked him out in the eighth round to capture the heavyweight crown.

3. Prior to the 1938 rematch between Louis and Max Schmeling, Franklin Roosevelt invited Louis to the White House, felt his biceps and proclaimed, "We need muscles like yours to beat Germany."

4. Louis made the comment before his 1941 title defense against light heavyweight champion Billy Conn. Conn boxed Louis successfully for 12 rounds, but was knocked out in the 13th.

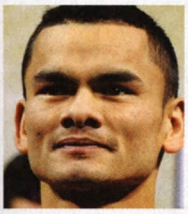
Thomas Hauser can be reached by email at thauser@rcn.com. His most recent book — *And the New ...: An Inside Look at Another Year in Boxing* was published by the University of Arkansas Press.

FIGHTERS' FAVORITES

WHAT BOXERS ARE INTO OUTSIDE THE SPORT

>>> MARCOS MAIDANA

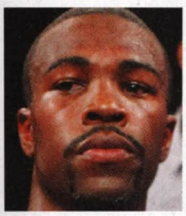
Welterweight contender from Argentina



MUSIC: Los Palmeras, a Santa Fe Cumbia-style group from Argentina.
CAR: I own an Audi TT 2.5T.
FOOD: Asado (Argentinean beef barbecue).
TATTOOS: I have more than 20. They include: Colt Python revolver on my waist, Jesus Christ's hands on my right leg, Virgin of Lujan on my back, Gauchito Gil (Argentina's most popular pagan saint) on my arm, and my son Yoyo's face on my chest.
ATHLETE (OUTSIDE BOXING): Diego Maradona (iconic Argentine soccer player).
MOVIE: *Das Parfum.*
VIDEO GAME: I don't really like video games but instead I am a huge fan of a card game called Truco.

>>> GARY RUSSELL JR.

Featherweight contender from the U.S.



MUSIC: Old School. Early 1980s. Isley Brothers, Smokey Robinson, Luther Vandross.
CAR: Ferrari. I have a 1965 Mustang and a 2009 Cadillac Escalade.
FOOD: Italian. I love pizza, pasta and everything in that category. Everything that I have to stay away from during training.
TATTOOS: I have a couple, but I'm done with tattoos. I have a bible quote on my chest. It says "My enemies and foes, they stumbled and fell, though an army may encamp against me, my heart shall not fear."
ATHLETE (OUTSIDE BOXING): I'm going to let you in on the life of Gary Russell Jr. Honestly, I'm not a sports fan at all. I don't watch basketball, don't watch football.
MOVIE: *Shottas.* It's a movie about two Jamaican guys who were friends since they were kids. They both end up being kingpins, their gangs cross paths and they get into a war. Great movie.
VIDEO GAME: *Sniper Elite.*

>>> PUNGLUANG SOR SINGYU

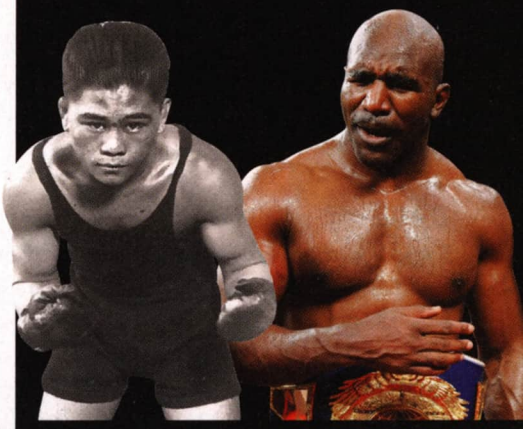
WBO bantamweight titleholder from Thailand

MUSIC: Carabao (a Thai rock band).
CAR: I drive a sedan, four doors. I would like a Toyota or Honda.
FOOD: Chicken and rice.
TATTOOS: A swan on my back.
ATHLETE (OUTSIDE BOXING): Juan Manuel Mata Garcia (Spanish soccer player).
MOVIE: *Naresuan* (about the Thai king who fought to liberate the country from Burmese rule).
VIDEO GAME: Soccer.

Images: OneSongchai Promotion

ADVANCED DEGREES

Degrees of separation between fighters of today and their predecessors. This month: Filipino flyweight legend Pancho Villa to still-active heavyweight Evander Holyfield.



PANCHO VILLA
fought …

Jimmy McLarnin, who fought …

Tony Canzoneri, who fought …

Jackie "Kid" Berg, who fought …

Tippy Larkin, who fought …

Freddie Archer, who fought …

Al McCoy, who fought …

Willie Pastrano, who fought …

Gregorio Peralta, who fought …

George Foreman, who fought …

▼

EVANDER HOLYFIELD

GOOD, BAD, WORSE

THE BEST AND WORST IN BOXING FROM THE PAST MONTH

By: **Michael Rosenthal**

GOOD

The retirement of Kelly Pavlik had a refreshing feel about it. The former middleweight champ said he simply realized that his heart was no longer in boxing and wanted to avoid the long term health problems that afflict so many fighters. Plus, he wanted to spend more time with his family. He also said he didn't squander the money he has earned, another misfortune many fighters face. In other words, this is how a fighter is supposed to go out – with his faculties in working order, a nice bank account and on his terms. He's only 30. The bulk of his life lies ahead. The important thing now is to stick with his decision. Many fighters "retire" only to return at later date. And many of them regret it.

BAD

I can't lament every instance of horrible scoring in boxing; that would be a full-time job. I couldn't let judge Tony Paolillo's card in the Juan Carlos Burgos-Rocky Martinez split-decision draw on Jan. 19 go without comment, though. Burgos dominated the WBO junior lightweight titleholder, pounding his body throughout and finishing with a huge advantage in punch stats (286-193 overall). Almost everyone thought Burgos won his first title. Paolillo somehow scored it 116-112 (eight rounds to four) for Martinez. Judge John Signorile (114-114) also blew it. Together, they stole something Burgos had earned. I guess it never ends.

WORSE

I'm no expert but I'm pretty sure doctors aren't supposed to make diagnoses without examining a patient. That's why speculation by a Filipino neurologist that Manny Pacquiao shows early signs of Parkinson's disease – leaving the impression that he's a damaged fighter – was outrageous. Dr. Rustico Jimenez reportedly said he noticed while watching TV that Pacquiao stuttered and his hands twitched, which apparently could be signs of Parkinson's. Jimenez did acknowledge that he could be wrong and suggested that Pacquiao undergo tests to determine the effects of so many ring wars. That's solid advice for any fighter. Let's wait until after the tests results are in before drawing any conclusions, though.

10 A MONTHLY BOXING LIST

THIS MONTH: Actors who starred as real-life boxers in movies

ERROL FLYNN
James J. Corbett in *Gentleman Jim* (1942)

PAUL NEWMAN
Rocky Graziano in *Somebody Up There Likes Me* (1956)

CAMERON MITCHELL
Barney Ross in *Monkey on My Back* (1957)

JAMES EARL JONES
Jack Johnson in *Great White Hope* (1970)

ROBERT DE NIRO
Jake LaMotta in *Raging Bull* (1980)

DENZEL WASHINGTON
Rubin "Hurricane" *Carter in The Hurricane* (1999)

JON FAVREAU
Rocky Marciano in *Rocky Marciano* (1999)

WILL SMITH
Muhammad Ali in *Ali* (2001)

RUSSELL CROWE
James J. Braddock in *Cinderella Man* (2005)

MARK WAHLBERG
Micky Ward in *The Fighter* (2010)

RING POLL

A MONTHLY POLL OF OUR RINGTV.COM READERS.

A number of prime candidates to reach the International Boxing Hall of Fame one day are still exchanging punches in the ring or at least have not been definitive about their retirements. Who is the best of that bunch? THE RING asked readers: **Who will be remembered as the greatest fighter when their careers are over?** Here are the results.

THE PERCENTAGES:

PACQUIAO	**43.0**
MAYWEATHER	**25.8**
MARQUEZ	**11.1**
JONES	**8.9**
HOPKINS	**7.2**
HOLYFIELD	**3.6**
MOSLEY	**0.4**

NOTE: 6,195 READERS VOTED IN THE POLL.

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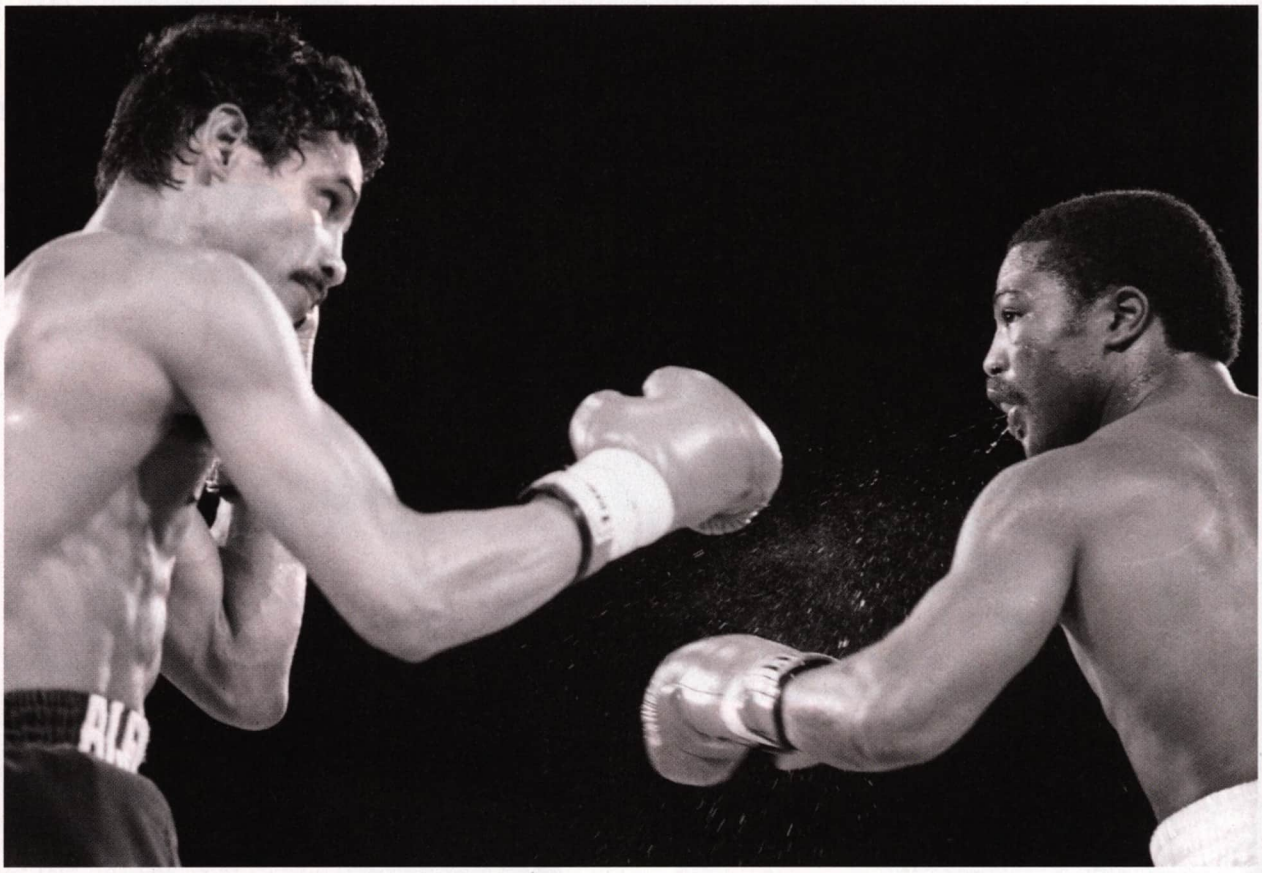


Image: THE RING

Aaron Pryor (right) said fellow Hall of Famer Alexis Arguello had the best boxing skills of anyone he fought.

AARON PRYOR

By: **Anson Wainwright**

Aaron Pryor is considered by many to be one of the greatest fighters who ever lived.

"The Hawk" was a reported 204-16 as an amateur and narrowly missed fighting for the U.S. in the 1976 Olympics. As a pro, between 1976 and 1990, he is fondly remembered as a marauding punching machine who drew comparisons to the legendary Henry Armstrong.

Pryor (39-1, 35 knockouts) won the WBA junior welterweight title in 1980 by knocking out fellow Hall of Famer Antonio Cervantes in four rounds. He held the title until 1983, making eight successful defenses. He beat a number of very good fighters but he is defined by his two fights against another Hall of Famer, Alexis Arguello. In 1982, the rivals waged war for 14 brutal rounds before Arguello succumbed to Pryor's swarming attack in THE RING Magazine's Fight of the Decade. Pryor also won the rematch in 1983, this time in 10 rounds.

He vacated the WBA title before winning the inaugural IBF championship in 1984 and made one successful defense. He retired in 1985 but two years later returned to suffer his only loss, a seventh-round TKO against Bobby Joe Young in 1987. He retired for good in 1990 after beating three journeymen.

Today, Pryor, 57, is a regular attendee at the International Boxing Hall of Fame's induction weekends. He graciously spoke with THE RING about the best he faced in 10 categories:

BEST OVERALL
ANTONIO CERVANTES

Looking back on my career, I would like to say a guy by the name of Antonio Cervantes. Cervantes had 100 fights, held the championship for about 10 years (in two separate reigns) until he fought me. He knocked me down in the first round, I got back up and knocked him out. I think Cervantes was one of the greatest I ever fought.

BEST BOXER
ALEXIS ARGUELLO

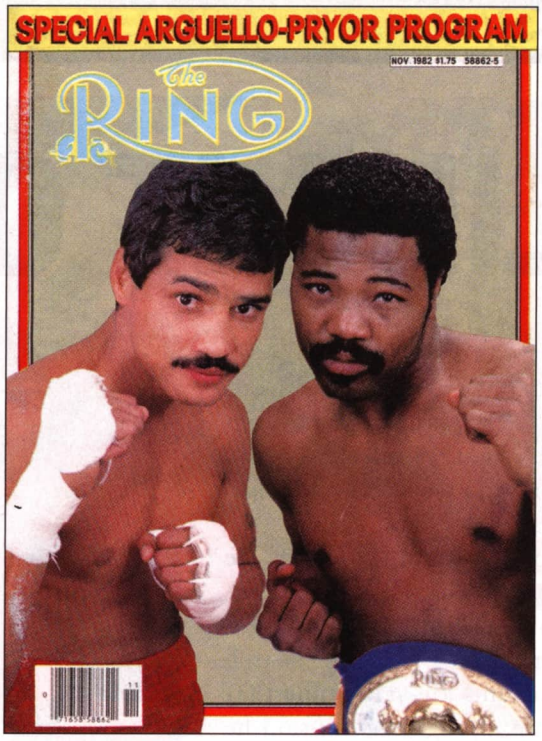
He boxed and he punched with me in (the first) fight and a lot of people didn't see what he was doing. It was a great fight; it went 14 rounds and he got stopped in the 14th, but up until then it was anyone's fight. Alexis Arguello was all class.

BEST JAB
AKIO KAMEDA

I would like to say Akio Kameda from Japan. He was a good puncher and boxer, he was left-handed, he was 6-feet (tall) and he had a lot of heart. I wasn't expecting to get hit by no left hand jab; he did a good job with his jab. I liked the way he boxed. I out-punched him but he was a good boxer.

BEST DEFENSE
NORMAN GOINS

A guy I always remember is Norman Goins from Indianapolis. He was the one who was consistent. He was an international boxer as an amateur. We fought in 1973 in Denver at the Golden Gloves. He was one of the only guys who hit me and hurt me, and they stopped the fight. I was only 16; he was 20. He hurt me with a body shot. So when I was 20 and he was 24 we fought again in Cincinnati and I knocked him out in the ninth round.



Rivals Alexis Arguello (left) and Aaron Pryor shared great moments in the ring and a RING cover.
Image: THE RING

BEST CHIN
ARGUELLO

Well, you know who had the best chin. I had 40 fights and 35 were knockouts. I think Alexis Arguello; I can never take anything away from him. If you look at that fight, Alexis took punches nobody else had before. He got hit time and time again on the chin and he shook it off and kept coming. A lot of guys I hit, they went down. Alexis in the first fight went 14 rounds and then the second fight 10 rounds. Fourteen rounds taking all the punches. He took a lot of punishment. I respect that.

BEST PUNCHER
CERVANTES

Antonio Cervantes from Colombia was the best I ever took.

FASTEST HANDS
AL FORD

Before I became a light welterweight, I had about 11 fights (at lightweight). There was a guy named Al Ford. I was thinking about what he had achieved in boxing. He already had an international name, in the amateurs and as a professional. He had lightweight hands.

FASTEST FEET
ARGUELLO

The person to me was Alexis Arguello; he had the quickest feet I ever saw.

SMARTEST
ARGUELLO

I think Alexis Arguello was the smartest fighter I fought. He was fighting for his fourth world title; he had won three already. I take nothing away from him.

STRONGEST
ARGUELLO

I always said if I'm going to die, I'm going to die right here in the ring cause this is what I know how to do. This is what I love. I think (Arguello) thought the same way. The longer the fight went, the harder it got. I was shocked. I had a lot of energy throwing punches but Alexis Arguello, he stayed in there. It was a real hard fight for 14 rounds.

CALLING IT OFF

By: **Brian Harty**

RING super middleweight champ **Andre Ward** tore his shoulder while training, forcing him to cancel his Feb. 23 fight with **Kelly Pavlik**. Surgery to repair the injury was a success and Ward started rehab in mid-January.

Ward was expected to be out up to six weeks. He could return to the ring in the fall.

Meanwhile, Pavlik, who described himself as "brokenhearted," initially seemed as if he would search for another challenge. Around the same time that Ward went under the knife, though, Pavlik said he wanted to leave boxing with his faculties intact and announced his retirement. (He did say he was only "95 percent" sure, however.) ...

Pavlik wasn't alone in his mindset. Polish heavyweight **Mariusz Wach** admitted to Boxingscene.com that his "heart is no longer in boxing." This coincided with Wach's admission that banned substances were in his system when he fought **Wladimir Klitschko** in November, though he maintained that his coaches were to blame. ...

Mexican bantamweight star **Jesus "Chucho" Castillo** died on Jan. 15 at the age of 68. A very popular attraction at the Forum in Los Angeles during the late 1960's and early 70's, Castillo's controversial decision loss to **Lionel Rose** ignited a pyromaniacal riot in 1968. He was best known for a trilogy of title fights against **Ruben Olivares**, the second of which he won to capture the WBA and WBC belts in 1970. ...

Another Mexican former champion, **Isidro Perez**, had been missing for months before his body was located by his sister at a morgue in Mexico City. Perez stopped **Angel Rosario** to win the WBO flyweight title in 1990 and defended it successfully twice. ...

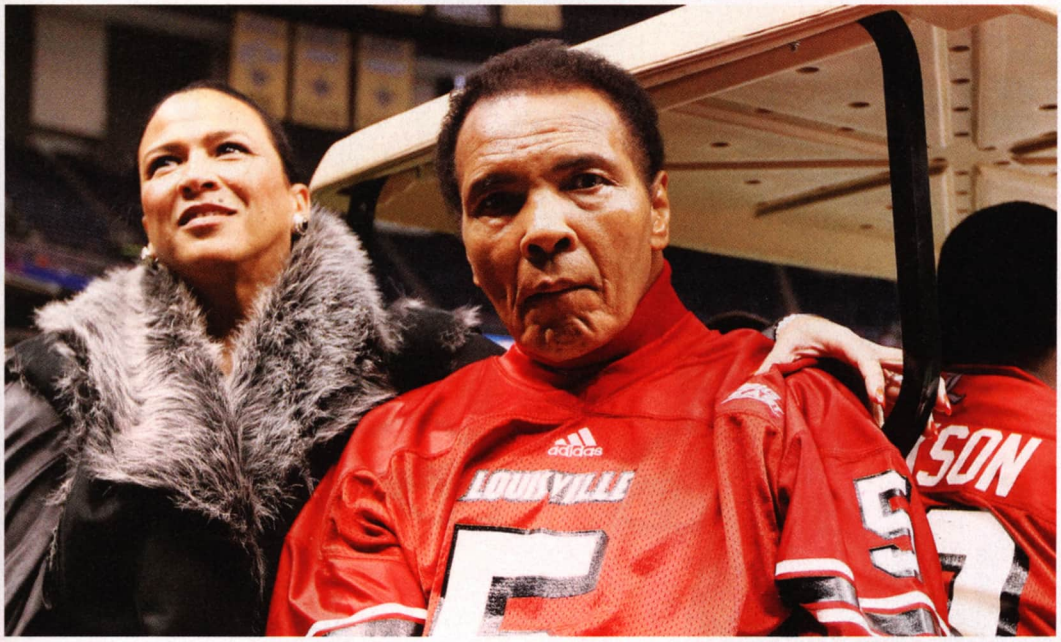
Wilfred Benitez, 54, was briefly hospitalized in Puerto Rico for a mild stroke. Benitez was only 17 years old when he took the WBA junior welterweight title from **Antonio Cervantes** in 1976 and finished his career in 1990 with a record of 53-8-1 (31 knockouts). ...

Image: Kevork Djansezian-Bongarts-Getty

Super middleweight champion Andre Ward had successful shoulder surgery and could fight again in the fall.

Just a few hours into 2013, **Austin Trout** was arrested on suspicion of public intoxication at a taco joint in Texas but was released soon afterward without being charged. Trout said he wasn't drunk at all and was helping to break up a fight when officers arrived and he got swept up with others in the dragnet. ...

In New York, the latest attempt to build a domestic heavyweight attraction was announced by promoter **Don Elbaum**: The Great American Heavyweight Box-Off (which goes by the catchy acronym "TGAHBO"). Eight participants, including 2004 Olympian **Jason Estrada**, will compete over three rounds for $500,000 in purse money, with the eventual winner to pocket more than half of that. It begins early this year. ■



Muhammad Ali and wife Lonnie represented the University of Louisville, from Ali's hometown, during the coin flip for the Sugar Bowl.
Image: Kevin C. Cox-Getty

'THE GREATEST' SPEAKS FOR HIMSELF

By: **Brian Harty**

Every month there is at least one story reporting on the whereabouts of Muhammad Ali. Often it's at a ceremony to receive an award. Sometimes it's a football game, or a funeral. His appearance is always an event.

There also is always someone there to tell us what's inside Ali's mind. In January the event was Ali's 71st birthday, and the interpreter was Gene Kilroy.

"It was good to see him in great spirits and looking so good," Kilroy told The Associated Press. "He's very comfortable in his Parkinson's body. As he said many times, it could be worse."

Two things to be absolutely clear about: I don't know Muhammad Ali at all and few people are more devoted than Kilroy, who has been steadfastly at Ali's side as both business manager and friend since the 1960 Olympics. He would never intentionally misrepresent the man. Still, I feel confident going out on a limb by saying that Muhammad Ali – who was known throughout the world as "The Greatest" for the prowess of his body, the stature of his spirit and the volume of his voice – is not at *all* comfortable in his Parkinson's body. Bearing his fate with characteristic grace and defiance, yes, but I doubt that he's comfortable with it. And we shouldn't be, either.

There have been many attempts in the past year to soften the reality of Ali's condition. A few months ago a Luis Vuitton ad campaign featured what appeared to be a highly-Photoshopped image (by Annie Liebowitz) of a smiling, smooth-faced Ali alongside his vintage-gloved grandson. In December, photos from the WBC convention in Cancun showed a stage full of boxing luminaries surrounding a bewildered-looking Ali, red cape draped on his shoulders and Burger King-style crown perched on his head. He had just been named the "King of Boxing." I forwarded one of those photos to THE RING Editor Michael Rosenthal and he agreed: Ali looked foolish.

Everyone meant well, surely. We've reached the point with Ali where he has become like an ailing parent. We feel the need to book that plane ticket for a visit. We do these things while he can still see, as if to make sure that he is proud of us. That we made something of ourselves through what he gave us. To let him know that he changed us, did a good job raising us, made a difference. We don't want him to go without knowing that.

But in everyone's rush to hang one more medal around his neck, the people around Ali should do more to prevent him from becoming a tool for our purposes, whether it's to sell handbags or to make ourselves feel better. We should not forget who he is. He is a fighter. *He* did those things. *He* changed the world. He doesn't need us to speak for him. ■

BY HEATHER SHANHOLTZ

DANIELLA DIOR

HEIGHT: 5-foot-5
WEIGHT: 118 pounds
MEASUREMENTS: 34-23-34
STANCE: Orthodox
FAVORITE BOXER: Muhammad Ali
HOMETOWN: Cleveland
CURRENT LOCATION: Cleveland
WHERE YOU'VE SEEN HER: Playboy.com Cyber Girl
BOOKING INFO: www.DaniellaDior.com

Image: **Dave Alan**

DANIELLA DIOR

Image: Dave Alan

THE RING CARD GIRL OF THE MONTH BY: **HEATHER SHANHOLTZ**

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DO YOU WANT TO BE A RING CARD GIRL OF THE MONTH?

submit photos and bio to **ringcardgirl@sepublications.com**

Image: **Dave Alan**

Image: Naoki Fukuda

Mikey Garcia (left) easily passed the biggest test of his career, defeating Orlando Salido on Jan. 19.

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH:

MIKEY GARCIA

By: **Michael Rosenthal**

All talented young fighters need a legitimate test to prove they are more substance than potential. Mikey Garcia's test came on Jan. 19 at Madison Square Garden in New York.

Orlando Salido isn't a great technician and might have some wear and tear on his body but the rugged Mexican had proved to be an elite fighter, one with a swarming style that overwhelms opponents and a chin seemingly immune to the biggest punches. And he had a track record: Most recently, his two knockouts of Juan Manuel Lopez propelled him to the top of THE RING's featherweight ratings.

Thus, we were destined to learn exactly what Garcia is made of. And we were impressed.

Garcia (31-0, 26 knockouts) dominated his baffled elder with a lethal combination of skill, power and composure beyond his 25 years. The Mexican-American put Salido (39-12-2, 27 KOs) down a stunning four times and won every round before settling for an eighth-round technical decision because of a broken nose, the result of a head butt.

In the process, Garcia won the RING featherweight championship and the respect of both experts and fans who now know that he is the real deal.

Of course, one important victory shouldn't propel anyone into the pound-for-pound stratosphere. Garcia has more to prove. At the same time, we might look back on Jan. 19 as the day a star was born. ■

POUND FOR POUND: No change.

HEAVYWEIGHTS: No change.

CRUISERWEIGHTS: No change.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS: Undefeated Russian Sergei Kovalev (unrated last month) dominated and demoralized Gabriel Campillo (No. 3 last month) en route to a third-round stoppage. With the win, Kovalev stormed into the ratings at No. 5 while Campillo plummeted to No. 9.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS: No change.

MIDDLEWEIGHTS: No change.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS: No change.

WELTERWEIGHTS: No change.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS: No change.

LIGHTWEIGHTS: No change.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS: Roman Martinez (No. 3 last month) fought to a draw -- on the scorecards, anyway -- against Juan Carlos Burgos (No. 7 at the time). Martinez fell a notch to No. 4 and Burgos rose to No. 5. Former Jorge Linares-slasher Sergio Thompson took over the No. 10 spot from Bryan Vazquez after a fifth-round knockout of Moises Castro (unrated).

FEATHERWEIGHTS: Mikey Garcia (No. 3 last month) became RING champion, getting there by way of a shellacking that ended in a whimper. He routed No. 1-rated Orlando Salido for eight rounds, dropping him four times, but was unable to continue after a head butt broke his nose. Salido fell to No. 3 after the loss. Chris John moved into the No. 1 position, Daniel Ponce de Leon landed at No. 2 and everyone else from Billy Dib downward moved up a notch. Undefeated Dominican Javier Fortuna took the No. 10 spot.

Image: Toru Yamanaka-AFP-Getty

Kohei Kono (right) entered the junior bantamweight ratings at No. 6 after his stunning fourth-round knockout of Tepparith Singwancha.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS: Rico Ramos (No. 4 last month) was dropped from the ratings after losing a unanimous decision to prospect Ronny Rios in a featherweight bout. Victor Terrazas, whose recent conquests have included Nehomar Cermeno and Fernando Montiel, moved in at No. 10.

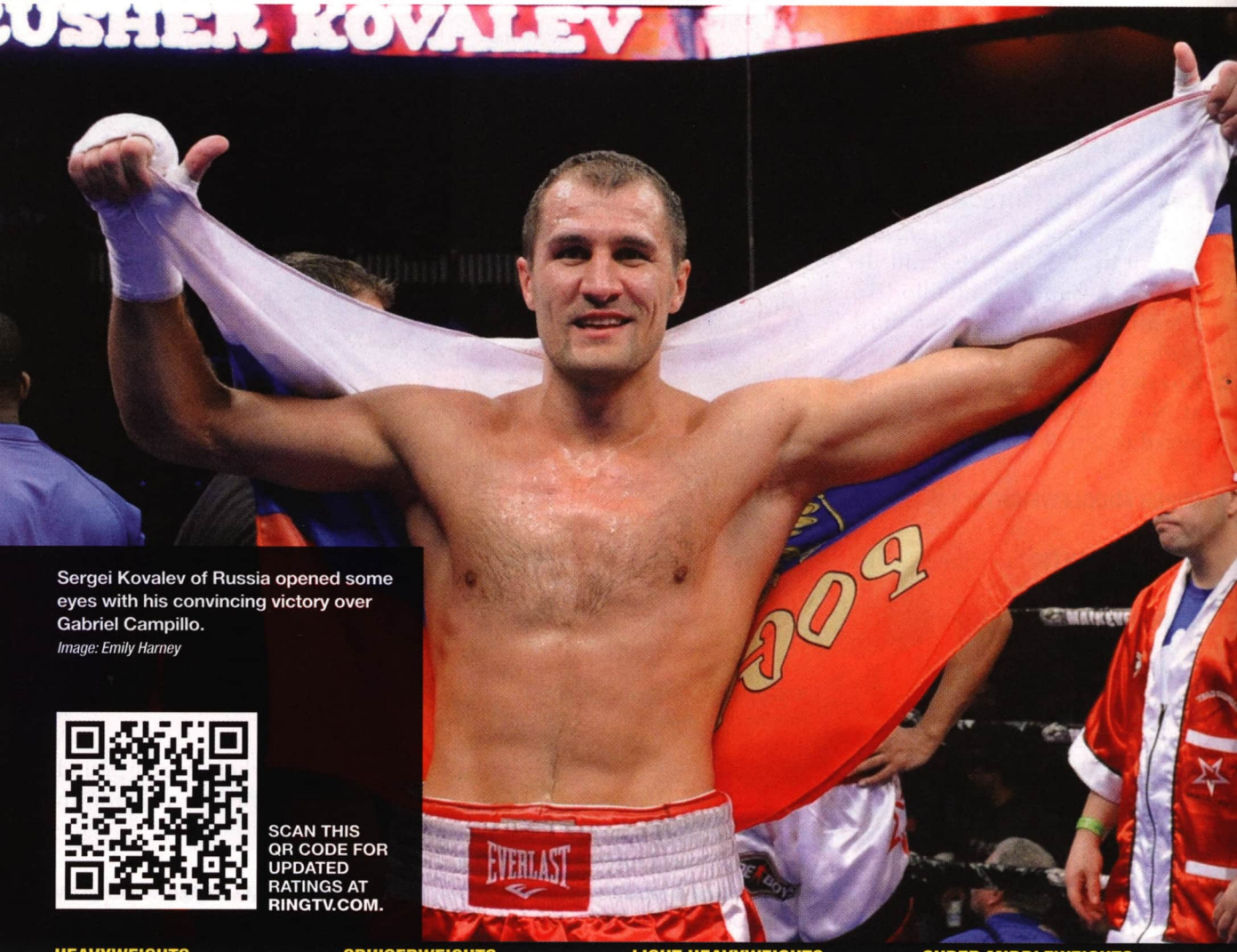
BANTAMWEIGHTS: No change.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS: No. 3-rated Yota Sato moved up to No. 2 after scoring a unanimous decision over countryman Ryo Akaho (No. 7 last month), who dropped to No. 8. The previous No. 2, Thai fighter Tepparith Singwancha, was upset by unrated Japanese spoiler Kohei Kono, whose fourth-round stoppage landed him at No. 6 in the ratings.

FLYWEIGHTS: No change.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS: Japanese upstart Kazuto Ioka (No. 1 strawweight last month) left the 105-pound division and arrived at No. 5 with a title-winning knockout of Jose Alfredo Rodriguez (unrated).

STRAWWEIGHTS: Passing Ioka on the opposite escalator, Ryo Miyazaki (No. 7 junior flyweight last month) left the 108-pound division for strawweight and won a majority decision against rugged Thai fighter Pornsawan Porpramook (unrated). Ioka's departure moved Moises Fuentes into the No. 1 spot and everyone else through Akira Yaegashi (No. 8 last month) up a notch. Miyazaki entered at No. 8.



Sergei Kovalev of Russia opened some eyes with his convincing victory over Gabriel Campillo.
Image: Emily Harney

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HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C **WLADIMIR KLITSCHKO**
Ukraine | 59-3-0 (50 KOs)

1. **VITALI KLITSCHKO**
Ukraine | 45-2-0 (41 KOs)
2. **ALEXANDER POVETKIN**
Russia | 25-0-0 (17 KOs)
3. **DAVID HAYE**
UK | 26-2-0 (24 KOs)
4. **KUBRAT PULEV**
Bulgaria | 17-0-0 (9 KOs)
5. **TOMASZ ADAMEK**
Poland | 48-2-0 (29 KOs)
6. **ROBERT HELENIUS**
Finland | 18-0-0 (11 KOs)
7. **DENIS BOYTSOV**
Russia | 31-0-0 (25 KOs)
8. **RUSLAN CHAGAEV**
Uzbekistan | 30-2-1 (19 KOs)
9. **CHRIS ARREOLA**
U.S. | 35-2-0 (30 KOs)
10. **TYSON FURY**
UK | 20-0-0 (14 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 LBS

C **YOAN PABLO HERNANDEZ**
Cuba | 27-1-0 (13 KOs)

1. **MARCO HUCK**
Germany | 35-2-1 (25 KOs)
2. **KRZYSZTOF WLODARCZYK**
Poland | 47-2-1 (33 KOs)
3. **OLA AFOLABI**
UK | 19-2-4 (9 KOs)
4. **DENIS LEBEDEV**
Russia | 25-1-0 (19 KOs)
5. **LATEEF KAYODE**
Nigeria | 18-0-0 (14 KOs)
6. **MATEUSZ MASTERNAK**
Poland | 29-0-0 (21 KOs)
7. **TROY ROSS**
Canada | 25-3-0 (16 KOs)
8. **FIRAT ARSLAN**
Germany | 32-6-2 (21 KOs)
9. **DMYTRO KUCHER**
Ukraine | 20-0-0 (15 KOs)
10. **RAKHIM CHAKHKIEV**
Russia | 116-0-0 (12 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 LBS

C **CHAD DAWSON**
U.S. | 31-2-0 (17 KOs)

1. **BERNARD HOPKINS**
U.S. | 52-6-2 (32 KOs)
2. **TAVORIS CLOUD**
U.S. | 24-0-0 (19 KOs)
3. **NATHAN CLEVERLY**
UK | 25-0-0 (12 KOs)
4. **BEIBUT SHUMENOV**
Kazakhstan | 13-1-0 (8 KOs)
5. **SERGEI KOVALEV**
Russia | 20-0-1 (18 KOs)
6. **KARO MURAT**
Germany | 25-1-1 (15 KOs)
7. **ISAAC CHILEMBA**
Malawi | 19-1-1 (9 KOs)
8. **JUERGEN BRAEHMER**
Germany | 38-2-0 (30 KOs)
9. **GABRIEL CAMPILLO**
Spain | 21-5-1 (8 KOs)
10. **TONY BELLEW**
UK | 19-1-0 (12 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 LBS

C **ANDRE WARD**
U.S. | 26-0-0 (14 KOs)

1. **CARL FROCH**
UK | 30-2-0 (22 KOs)
2. **MIKKEL KESSLER**
Denmark | 46-2-0 (35 KOs)
3. **LUCIAN BUTE**
Romania | 31-1-0 (24 KOs)
4. **THOMAS OOSTHUIZEN**
South Africa | 21-0-1 (13 KOs)
5. **ARTHUR ABRAHAM**
Armenia | 36-3-0 (28 KOs)
6. **ROBERT STIEGLITZ**
Russia | 42-3-0 (23 KOs)
7. **GEORGE GROVES**
UK | 16-0-0 (12 KOs)
8. **SAKIO BIKA**
Camaroon | 30-5-2 (21 KOs)
9. **ADONIS STEVENSON**
Canada | 19-1-0 (16 KOs)
10. **EDWIN RODRIGUEZ**
Dominican Rep. | 22-0-0 (15 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 LBS

C **SERGIO MARTINEZ**
Argentina | 50-2-2 (28 KOs)

1. **DANIEL GEALE**
Australia | 28-1-0 (15 KOs)
2. **FELIX STURM**
Germany | 37-3-2 (16 KOs)
3. **GENNADY GOLOVKIN**
Kazakhstan | 25-0-0 (22 KOs)
4. **JULIO CESAR CHAVEZ JR.**
Mexico | 46-1-1 (32 KOs)
5. **DMITRY PIROG**
Russia | 20-0-0 (15 KOs)
6. **MATTHEW MACKLIN**
UK | 29-4-0 (20 KOs)
7. **PETER QUILLIN**
U.S. | 28-0-0 (20 KOs)
8. **MARTIN MURRAY**
UK | 25-0-1 (11 KOs)
9. **HASSAN N'DAM**
France | 27-1-0 (17 KOs)
10. **GRZEGORZ PROKSA**
Poland | 28-2-0 (21 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 LBS

C **VACANT**

1. **FLOYD MAYWEATHER JR.**
U.S. | 43-0-0 (26 KOs)
2. **SAUL ALVAREZ**
Mexico | 41-0-1 (30 KOs)
3. **AUSTIN TROUT**
U.S. | 26-0-0 (14 KOs)
4. **MIGUEL COTTO**
Puerto Rico | 37-4-0 (30 KOs)
5. **ERISLANDY LARA**
Cuba | 17-1-2 (11 KOs)
6. **VANES MARTIROSYAN**
U.S. | 32-0-1 (20 KOs)
7. **CARLOS MOLINA**
Mexico | 20-5-2 (6 KOs)
8. **JAMES KIRKLAND**
U.S. | 31-1-0 (27 KOs)
9. **CORNELIUS BUNDRAGE**
U.S. | 32-4-0 (19 KOs)
10. **ZAURBEK BAYSANGUROV**
Russia | 28-1-0 (20 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 LBS

C **VACANT**

1. **FLOYD MAYWEATHER JR.**
U.S. | 43-0-0 (26 KOs)
2. **JUAN MANUEL MARQUEZ**
Mexico | 55-6-1 (40 KOs)
3. **ROBERT GUERRERO**
U.S. | 31-1-1 (18 KOs)
4. **MANNY PACQUIAO**
Philippines | 54-5-2 (38 KOs)
5. **KELL BROOK**
UK | 29-0-0 (19 KOs)
6. **PAULIE MALIGNAGGI**
U.S. | 32-4-0 (7 KOs)
7. **JAN ZAVECK**
Slovenia | 32-2-0 (18 KOs)
8. **TIMOTHY BRADLEY**
U.S. | 29-0-0 (12 KOs)
9. **VICTOR ORTIZ**
U.S. | 29-4-2 (22 KOs)
10. **DEVON ALEXANDER**
U.S. | 24-1-0 (13 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 LBS

C **DANNY GARCIA**
U.S. | 25-0-0 (16 KOs)

1. **LUCAS MATTHYSSE**
Argentina | 32-2-0 (30 KOs)
2. **AMIR KHAN**
UK | 27-3-0 (19 KOs)
3. **ZAB JUDAH**
U.S. | 42-7-0 (29 KOs)
4. **JUAN MANUEL MARQUEZ**
Mexico | 55-6-1 (40 KOs)
5. **BRANDON RIOS**
U.S. | 31-0-1 (23 KOs)
6. **KHABIB ALLAKHVERDIEV**
Russia | 18-0-0 (8 KOs)
7. **MIKE ALVARADO**
U.S. | 33-1-0 (23 KOs)
8. **DENIS SHAFIKOV**
Russia | 31-0-1 (17 KOs)
9. **CESAR CUENCA**
Argentina | 43-0-0 (1 KO)
10. **RUSLAN PROVODNIKOV**
Russia | 22-1-0 (15 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 LBS

C **VACANT**

1. **ADRIEN BRONER**
U.S. | 25-0-0 (21 KOs)
2. **MIGUEL VAZQUEZ**
Mexico | 33-3-0 (13 KOs)
3. **ANTONIO DEMARCO**
Mexico | 28-3-1 (21 KOs)
4. **RICKY BURNS**
UK | 35-2-0 (10 KOs)
5. **RICHARD ABRIL**
Cuba | 17-3-1 (8 KOs)
6. **GAVIN REES**
UK | 37-1-1 (18 KOs)
7. **SHARIF BOGERE**
Uganda | 23-0-0 (15 KOs)
8. **KEVIN MITCHELL**
UK | 33-2-0 (24 KOs)
9. **RAYMUNDO BELTRAN**
Mexico | 27-6-0 (17 KOs)
10. **DANIEL ESTRADA**
Mexico | 30-2-1 (22 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 LBS

C **VACANT**

1. **TAKASHI UCHIYAMA**
Japan | 19-0-1 (16 KOs)
2. **JUAN CARLOS SALGADO**
Mexico | 26-1-1 (16 KOs)
3. **YURIORKIS GAMBOA**
Cuba | 22-0-0 (16 KOs)
4. **ROMAN MARTINEZ**
Puerto Rico | 26-1-2 (16 KOs)
5. **JUAN CARLOS BURGOS**
Mexico | 30-1-1 (20 KOs)
6. **DIEGO MAGDALENO**
U.S. | 23-0-0 (9 KOs)
7. **ARGENIS MENDEZ**
Dom. Rep. | 20-2-0 (10 KOs)
8. **GAMALIEL DIAZ**
Mexico | 37-9-2 (17 KOs)
9. **TAKAHIRO AO**
Japan | 23-3-1 (10 KOs)
10. **SERGIO THOMPSON**
Mexico | 26-2-0 (24 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 LBS

C **MIKEY GARCIA**
U.S. | 31-0-0 (26 KOs)

1. **CHRIS JOHN**
Indonesia | 48-0-2 (22 KOs)
2. **DANIEL PONCE DE LEON**
Mexico | 44-4-0 (35 KOs)
3. **ORLANDO SALIDO**
Mexico | 39-12-2 (27 KOs)
4. **BILLY DIB**
Australia | 35-1-0 (21 KOs)
5. **JHONNY GONZALEZ**
Mexico | 52-8-0 (45 KOs)
6. **JUAN MANUEL LOPEZ**
Puerto Rico | 31-2-0 (28 KOs)
7. **CELESTINO CABALLERO**
Panama | 36-4-0 (23 KOs)
8. **DAUD YORDAN**
Indonesia | 30-2-0 (23 KOs)
9. **NICHOLAS WALTERS**
Jamaica | 22-0-0 (18 KOs)
10. **JAVIER FORTUNA**
Domican Rep. | 21-0-0 (15 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 LBS

C **NONITO DONAIRE**
Philippines | 31-1-0 (20 KOs)

1. **GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX**
Cuba | 11-0-0 (8 KOs)
2. **ABNER MARES**
U.S. | 25-0-1 (13 KOs)
3. **JEFFREY MATHEBULA**
South Africa | 26-4-2 (14 KOs)
4. **ALEXANDER BAKHTIN**
Russia | 30-0-0 (11 KOs)
5. **CARL FRAMPTON**
UK | 15-0-0 (10 KOs)
6. **TOMOKI KAMEDA**
Japan | 26-0-0 (17 KOs)
7. **VIC DARCHINYAN**
Armenia | 38-5-1 (27 KOs)
8. **SCOTT QUIGG**
UK | 25-0-1 (18 KOs)
9. **HOZUMI HASEGAWA**
Japan | 31-4-0 (13 KOs)
10. **VICTOR TERRAZAS**
Mexico | 36-2-1 (21 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. THE RING's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another; 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders chose not to fight one another and either of them fights No. 3, No. 4 or No. 5, the winner may be awarded THE RING belt if the Editorial Board deems the contenders worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

THE RING Ratings Chairman Chuck Giampa considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world but has final say on all changes. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

Records provided by boxrec.com

RING RATINGS

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 LBS

C VACANT

1. **ANSELMO MORENO**
   Panama | 33-2-1 (12 KOs)
2. **SHINSUKE YAMANAKA**
   Japan | 23-0-1 (13 KOs)
3. **LEO SANTA CRUZ**
   Mexico | 23-0-1 (13 KOs)
4. **KOKI KAMEDA**
   Japan | 29-1-0 (17 KOs)
5. **MALCOLM TUNACAO**
   Philippines | 32-2-3 (20 KOs)
6. **HUGO RUIZ**
   Mexico | 31-2-0 (28 KOs)
7. **PUNGLUANG SOR SINGYU**
   Thailand | 43-1-0 (28 KOs)
8. **JULIO CEJA**
   Mexico | 23-0-0 (21 KOs)
9. **RYOSUKE IWASA**
   Japan | 13-1-0 (9 KOs)
10. **JAMIE MCDONNELL**
    UK | 20-2-1 (9 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 LBS

C VACANT

1. **OMAR NARVAEZ**
   Argentina | 38-1-2 (20 KOs)
2. **YOTA SATO**
   Japan | 26-2-1 (12 KOs)
3. **SURIYAN SOR RUNGVISAI**
   Thailand | 23-5-1 (9 KOs)
4. **JUAN CARLOS SANCHEZ JR.**
   Mexico | 15-1-1 (8 KOs)
5. **CARLOS CUADRAS**
   Mexico | 27-0-0 (22 KOs)
6. **KOHEI KONO**
   Japan | 28-7-0 (11 KOs)
7. **TEPPARITH SINGWANCHA**
   Thailand | 21-3-0 (13 KOs)
8. **RYO AKAHO**
   Japan | 19-1-2 (12 KOs)
9. **RODEL MAYOL**
   Philippines | 31-6-2 (22 KOs)
10. **OLEYDONG SITHSAMERCHAI**
    Thailand | 45-1-1 (16 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 LBS

C TOSHIYUKI IGARASHI
Japan | 17-1-1 (10 KOs)

1. **BRIAN VILORIA**
   U.S. | 32-3-0 (19 KOs)
2. **HERNAN MARQUEZ**
   Mexico | 34-3-0 (25 KOs)
3. **MORUTI MTHALANE**
   S. Africa | 29-2-0 (20 KOs)
4. **SONNY BOY JARO**
   Philippines | 34-11-5 (24 KOs)
5. **MILAN MELINDO**
   Philippines | 28-0-0 (11 KOs)
6. **ROCKY FUENTES**
   Philippines | 35-6-2 (20 KOs)
7. **JUAN CARLOS REVECO**
   Argentina | 29-1-0 (16 KOs)
8. **EDGAR SOSA**
   Mexico | 47-7-0 (28 KOs)
9. **LUIS CONCEPCION**
   Panama | 27-3-0 (20 KOs)
10. **FROILAN SALUDAR**
    Philippines | 16-0-1 (11 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 LBS

C VACANT

1. **ROMAN GONZALEZ**
   Nicaragua | 34-0-0 (28 KOs)
2. **DONNIE NIETES**
   Philippines | 31-1-3 (17 KOs)
3. **ADRIAN HERNANDEZ**
   Mexico | 26-2-1 (16 KOs)
4. **ULISES SOLIS**
   Mexico | 35-2-3 (22 KOs)
5. **KAZUTO IOKA**
   Japan | 11-0-0 (7 KOs)
6. **MASAYUKI KURODA**
   Japan | 21-3-2 (13 KOs)
7. **KOMPAYAK PORPRAMOOK**
   Thailand | 48-4-0 (33 KOs)
8. **JOHNRIEL CASIMERO**
   Philippines | 17-2-0 (10 KOs)
9. **RYOICHI TAGUCHI**
   Japan | 17-1-1 (8 KOs)
10. **ALBERTO ROSSEL**
    Peru | 29-8-0 (13 KOs)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 LBS

C VACANT

1. **MOISES FUENTES**
   Mexico | 16-1-0 (8 KOs)
2. **RAUL GARCIA**
   Mexico | 33-2-1 (21 KOs)
3. **DENVER CUELLO**
   Philippines | 32-4-6 (21 KOs)
4. **WANHENG MENAYOTHIN**
   Thailand | 25-0-0 (8 KOs)
5. **MARIO RODRIGUEZ**
   Mexico | 15-6-4 (11 KOs)
6. **NKOSINATHI JOYI**
   South Africa | 23-1-0 (16 KOs)
7. **AKIRA YAEGASHI**
   Japan | 16-3-0 (9 KOs)
8. **RYO MIYAZAKI**
   Japan | 18-0-3 (10 KOs)
9. **HEKKIE BUDLER**
   South Africa | 21-1-0 (6 KOs)
10. **CARLOS BUITRAGO**
    Nicaragua | 24-0-0 (15 KOs)

POUND FOR POUND

1. **FLOYD MAYWEATHER JR.**
   U.S. | 43-0-0 (26 KOs) | WELTERWEIGHT/ JR. MIDDLEWEIGHT
2. **ANDRE WARD**
   U.S. | 26-0-0 (14 KOs) | SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT
3. **JUAN MANUEL MARQUEZ**
   Mexico | 55-6-1 (40 KOs) | JR. WELTERWEIGHT/ WELTERWEIGHT
4. **SERGIO MARTINEZ**
   Argentina | 50-2-2 (28 KOs) | MIDDLEWEIGHT
5. **NONITO DONAIRE**
   Philippines | 31-1-0 (20 KOs) | JR. FEATHERWEIGHT
6. **ADRIEN BRONER**
   U.S. | 25-0-0 (21 KOs) | LIGHTWEIGHT
7. **MANNY PACQUIAO**
   Philippines | 54-5-2 (38 KOs) | WELTERWEIGHT
8. **WLADIMIR KLITSCHKO**
   Ukraine | 59-3-0 (50 KOs) | HEAVYWEIGHT
9. **TIMOTHY BRADLEY**
   U.S. | 29-0-0 (12 KOs) | WELTERWEIGHT
10. **ROBERT GUERRERO**
    U.S. | 31-1-1 (18 KOs) | WELTERWEIGHT

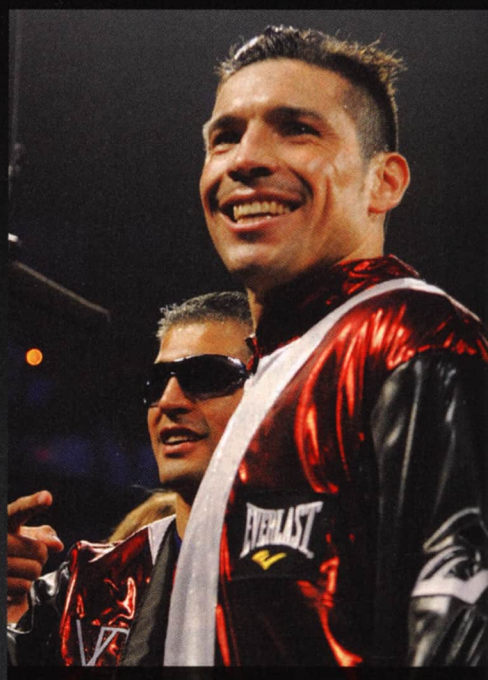


Image: Jeff Bottari-Getty

Sergio Martinez is scheduled to fight Martin Murray on April 27 in Buenos Aires.

THE RING POLICY ON RATED BOXERS WHO TEST POSITIVE FOR PERFORMANCE-ENHANCING DRUGS

THE RING will remove from its ratings any rated boxer — including a champion — if such boxer at some point undergoes drug testing (Olympic-style or otherwise) and that boxer tests positive for a performance-enhancing drug.

In the event that a boxer has undergone testing in which the boxer provides two samples ("A" and "B") and the boxer's "A" and subsequent "B" samples test positive for a performance-enhancing drug or if his "A" sample tests positive and he waives his right to have the "B" sample tested then the boxer shall immediately be removed from the ratings.

A boxer whose "A" sample tested positive and is awaiting the results of his "B" sample will not be allowed to fight for a championship or rise in the ratings.

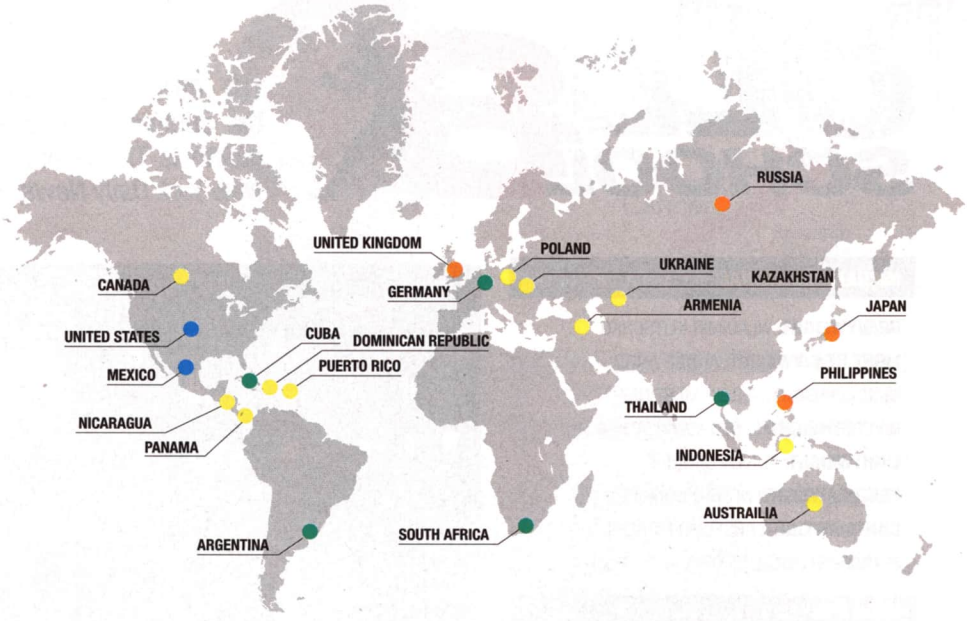
A boxer who is removed because of a positive test will have the opportunity to earn his way back into the ratings after any suspension period is completed.

A boxer who is dropped also may be reinstated if the testing agency subsequently reverses its decision or a court of competent jurisdiction finds that the test result was invalid.

RATED FIGHTERS BY COUNTRY

MEXICO	29*
UNITED STATES	26*
UNITED KINGDOM	17
JAPAN	16
RUSSIA	12
PHILIPPINES	11
THAILAND	6
ARGENTINA	5
CUBA	5
GERMANY	5
SOUTH AFRICA	5
POLAND	4
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	3
PANAMA	3
PUERTO RICO	3
UKRAINE	3
ARMENIA	2
AUSTRALIA	2
CANADA	2
INDONESIA	2
KAZAKHSTAN	2
NICARAGUA	2
BULGARIA	1
CAMEROON	1
DENMARK	1
FINLAND	1
FRANCE	1
JAMAICA	1
MALAWI	1
NIGERIA	1
PERU	1
ROMANIA	1
SLOVENIA	1
SPAIN	1
UGANDA	1
UZBEKISTAN	1

*Includes two ratings for Floyd Mayweather Jr. (junior middleweight, welterweight) and Juan Manuel Marquez (welterweight and junior welterweight).



YOUNG VS. OLD

Boxing might be a young man's sport, one that can wear a body down in a relatively short time. But that doesn't mean fighters who are 30 and older can't continue to find success, particularly in the heavier weight classes. Our ratings are evidence of that. Those in their 20s comprise 54.7 percent of rated fighters compared to a solid 45.3 for those 30-plus. Here is a division-by-division breakdown. We drew the age line at Jan. 21, the cutoff date for this month's ratings.

DIVISION	20s	30s-PLUS
HEAVYWEIGHTS	3	8
CRUISERWEIGHTS	5	6
LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS	5	6
SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS	4	7
MIDDLEWEIGHTS	4	7
JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS	7	3
WELTERWEIGHTS	5	5
JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS	5	6
LIGHTWEIGHTS	7	3
JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS	6	4
FEATHERWEIGHTS	6	5
JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS	5	6
BANTAMWEIGHTS	8	2
JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS	7	3
FLYWEIGHTS	7	4
JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS	6	4
STRAWWEIGHTS	8	2
TOTALS	98	81

Note: *Floyd Mayweather Jr. and Juan Manuel Marquez are counted twice because they are rated in two divisions.*

Image: Alexander Hassenstein-Bongarts-Getty

PACKING PUNCH

Which division is the pound-for-pound king in terms of punching power? The big boys, hands down. Here are the combined knockout ratios of the 10 or 11 fighters rated by THE RING in each of the 17 divisions, in order of highest ratio (knockouts divided by number of fights).

DIVISION	KO RATIO (%)
HEAVYWEIGHT	73.1
FEATHERWEIGHT	66.4
SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT	65.8
CRUISERWEIGHT	62.3
JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHT	61.7
MIDDLEWEIGHT	59.8
BANTAMWEIGHT	59.7
JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHT	57.9
LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT	57.5
JUNIOR FLYWEIGHT	55.3
JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHT	55.2
WELTERWEIGHT	55.0
FLYWEIGHT	54.5
JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHT	54.4
LIGHTWEIGHT	53.8
STRAWWEIGHT	49.0
JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHT	46.8

NOTE: *The country of fighters who have spent large portions of their lives in two countries was determined primarily by where they spent the bulk of their childhood.*

OLD SCHOOL 8

THE RING staff members' current champions in the original eight weight classes. Our guest this month is Tim Smith, a sports columnist with the *New York Daily News* and a contributor to THE RING.

MICHAEL ROSENTHAL RING MAGAZINE EDITOR

- **HEAVYWEIGHT:** WLADIMIR KLITSCHKO
- **LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT:** ANDRE WARD
- **MIDDLEWEIGHT:** SERGIO MARTINEZ
- **WELTERWEIGHT:** FLOYD MAYWEATHER JR.
- **LIGHTWEIGHT:** ADRIEN BRONER
- **FEATHERWEIGHT:** NONITO DONAIRE
- **BANTAMWEIGHT:** ANSELMO MORENO
- **FLYWEIGHT:** BRIAN VILORIA

DOUG FISCHER RINGTV.COM EDITOR

- **HEAVYWEIGHT:** WLADIMIR KLITSCHKO
- **LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT:** ANDRE WARD
- **MIDDLEWEIGHT:** SERGIO MARTINEZ
- **WELTERWEIGHT:** FLOYD MAYWEATHER JR.
- **LIGHTWEIGHT:** ADRIEN BRONER
- **FEATHERWEIGHT:** NONITO DONAIRE
- **BANTAMWEIGHT:** ANSELMO MORENO
- **FLYWEIGHT:** BRIAN VILORIA

LEM SATTERFIELD STAFF WRITER

- **HEAVYWEIGHT:** WLADIMIR KLITSCHKO
- **LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT:** ANDRE WARD
- **MIDDLEWEIGHT:** SERGIO MARTINEZ
- **WELTERWEIGHT:** FLOYD MAYWEATHER JR.
- **LIGHTWEIGHT:** ADRIEN BRONER
- **FEATHERWEIGHT:** NONITO DONAIRE
- **BANTAMWEIGHT:** ANSELMO MORENO
- **FLYWEIGHT:** BRIAN VILORIA

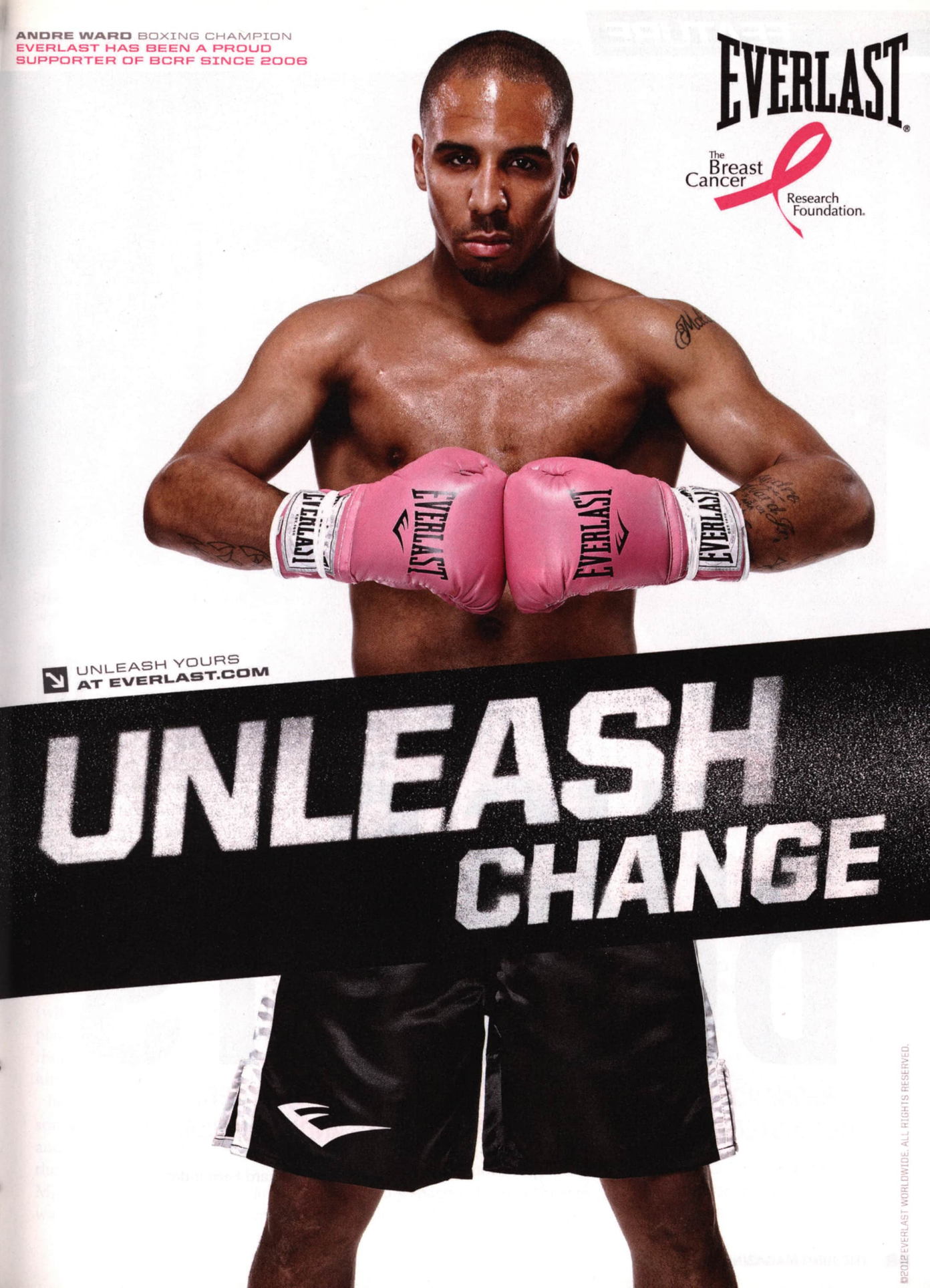
TIM SMITH NEWSPAPER COLUMNIST

- **HEAVYWEIGHT:** VITALI KLITSCHKO
- **LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT:** ANDRE WARD
- **MIDDLEWEIGHT:** SERGIO MARTINEZ
- **WELTERWEIGHT:** FLOYD MAYWEATHER JR.
- **LIGHTWEIGHT:** ADRIEN BRONER
- **FEATHERWEIGHT:** NONITO DONAIRE
- **BANTAMWEIGHT:** LEO SANTA CRUZ
- **FLYWEIGHT:** BRIAN VILORIA

Note: *This is how the weights break down: Heavyweight includes cruiserweight, light heavyweight includes super middleweight, all divisions middleweight through flyweight include the "junior" versions, and flyweight also includes strawweight.*

Image: Patrik Stollarz-AFP-Getty

Wladimir Klitschko is universally accepted as the best heavyweight in the world, as his belts might suggest.


ANDRE WARD BOXING CHAMPION
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The Breast Cancer Research Foundation.
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CHANGE
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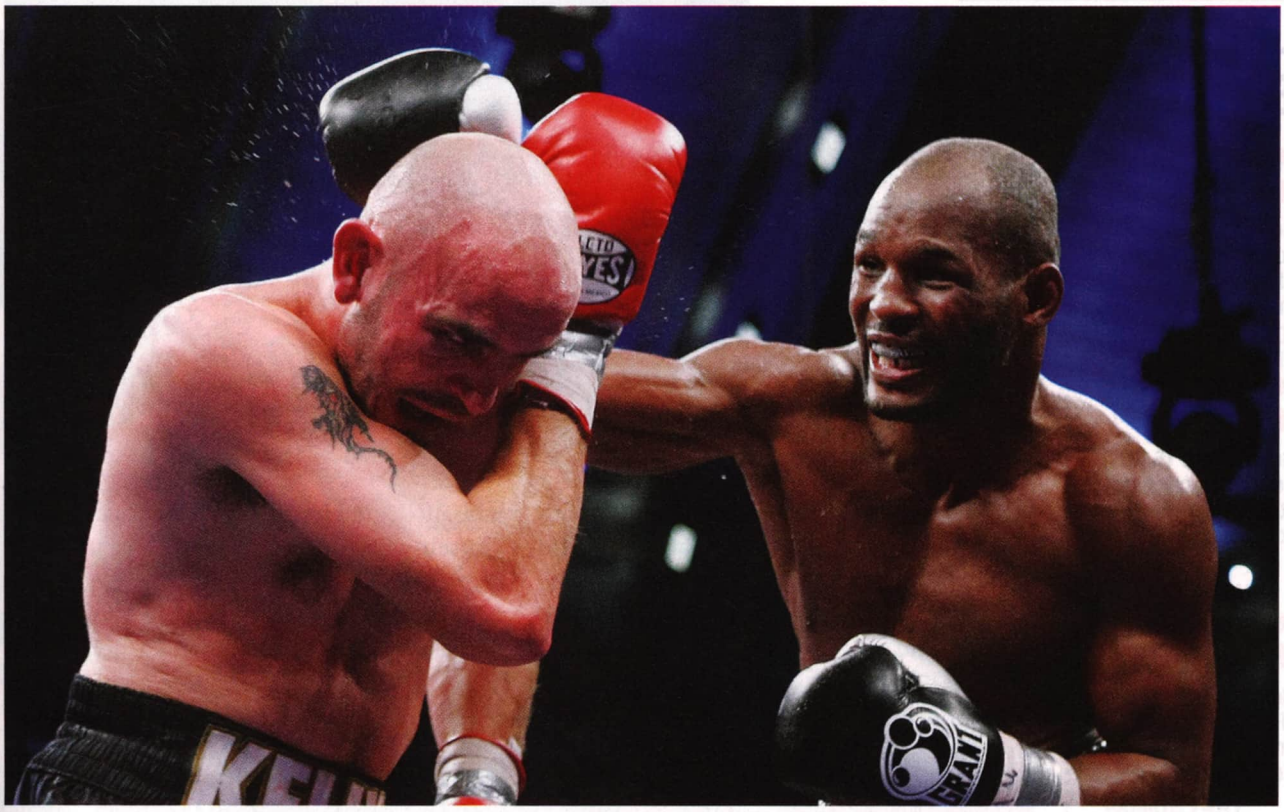
Image: Matt Rourke-Associated Press

JUST DESERTS

BERNARD HOPKINS ONCE WAS OVERSHADOWED BY OTHERS BUT HAS OUTLASTED HIS RIVALS TO CLAIM BIG PAYDAYS AND UNIVERSAL RESPECT

By: **Bernard Fernandez**



Images: Tim Larsen-Associated Press and THE RING

Bernard Hopkins (above right) has made a habit of beating up younger men, including Kelly Pavlik. Hopkins is pictured below in 1998 with his IBF middleweight belt, which he successfully defended a record 20 times.

More so than most, Glen Johnson understands what it is that spurs Bernard Hopkins to keep on keeping on at an age when most boxers are long since retired and, if they're fortunate, basking in the glory of what used to be.

Johnson not only was 43 in his most-recent bout but he faced Hopkins on one of the very best nights of Hopkins' Hall of Fame-worthy career, B-Hop retaining his IBF middleweight title by an 11th-round stoppage on July 20, 1997, in Indio, Calif. Johnson went into that fight with a record of 32-0 (with 23 knockouts) and a misplaced belief that no 160-pounder then on the planet could handle him so convincingly.

In the years after that fight, Johnson and Hopkins became friends and colleagues of sorts. Whenever the Philadelphian would train in Miami, where Johnson, a Jamaican, was residing, they'd spend time in

the gym together to the benefit of each.

"After me and Glen fought, I worked with him many times," said Hopkins (52-6-2, 32 KOs), who, at 48, challenges IBF light heavyweight champion Tavoris Cloud (24-0, 19 KOs) on March 9 at Barclays Center in Brooklyn, N.Y. "We got each other in shape. I'm not going to say he was my sparring partner; he was my helper. Glen held a construc-

AFTER 40

Notable 40-something fighters (including number of fights and both overall and title-fight records after turning 40):

49: Archie Moore (43-4-2, 8-2)
44: Ray Robinson (30-10-3*, 0-0)
25: Roberto Duran (18-7-0, 0-1)
24: Larry Holmes (21-3-0, 0-2)
20: George Foreman (17-3-0, 2-2)
17: Jack Johnson (12-5-0, 0-0)
12: Bernard Hopkins (7-4-1, 4-4-1)
11: Bob Fitzsimmons (6-3-1*, 1-1)
10: Willie Pep (9-1-0, 0-0)
9: Evander Holyfield (4-5, 0-3)
9: Glen Johnson (3-6, 0-3)

Note: Moore's year of birth is disputed. His mother said he was born in 1913, the year we used here. He claimed he was born in 1916.

** Robinson and Fitzsimmons had one no-contest each after turning 40.*

HOPKINS BY AGE

23
Record: 0-1
Loses pro debut to Clinton Mitchell by majority decision

25
Record: 8-0 (6 KOs)
Begins eye-catching steak of 22 consecutive victories

26
Record: 7-0 (6 KOs)
Fights in Las Vegas for first time, on Tyson-Ruddock card

27
Record: 6-0 (4 KOs)
KOs Wayne Powell in 21 seconds to win USBA middleweight title

28
Record: 3-1 (2 KOs)
Loses decision to Roy Jones Jr. for vacant IBF title

29
Record: 2-0-1 (1 KOs)
Draws with Segundo Mercado for vacant IBF title

Hopkins, 48, has celebrated many birthdays during his remarkable career.
Image: Alex Brandon-Associated Press

tion job for a long time. He knows what it's like when other guys, guys who might not be any more deserving than you, are getting multimillion-dollar purses – which they deserved – and you're, like, `When am I gonna get mine?'"

Johnson, known as the "Road Warrior" for his willingness to take on anyone at any time, even in the other fighter's back yard, said the memory of short purses and little recognition keeps Hopkins in the fight game now that he is a handsomely-paid living legend.

"Bernard has to feel it's time, and I don't think he believes it's time yet," Johnson said when asked when Hopkins might decide to hang up the gloves. "You have to remember, for a big part of his career Bernard was ignored. He was in the shadow of Roy Jones and some other guys who were more in the limelight. Now, he's finally getting his just due. It's not something he's going to walk away from until he absolutely has to."

Hopkins, who trained for the Cloud fight at the gritty Harrowgate Boxing Club in the Port Richmond section of Philly, said Johnson's assessment of his situation is spot on. He has outlasted some of the contemporaries who once overshadowed him, and he is convinced that history will treat him more kindly than them if he, well, keeps on making it.

"Who else in history competes only against himself?" said Hopkins, who hopes to replace himself as the oldest man to win a widely recognized world championship. He was 46 when he wrested the WBC 175-pound title from Jean Pascal by a unanimous decision on May 21, 2011, in Montreal, 192 days older than George Foreman was when Big George knocked out Michael Moorer to win the heavyweight title for the second time.

"I don't think there will be another duplicate of Bernard Hopkins in boxing, somebody who will make 20 defenses in the same weight class (which Hopkins did as a middleweight) or win a world championship at 46. Fighters today jump around from one weight class to another. Some fight into their 40s, but usually not as champions or championship contenders.

"You can make money at this or that, but history never goes broke. History outlasts money. You can't spend it all up or act like it don't exist. I'm going against one of the premier, if not the premier, light heavyweights out there. That's the challenge to me. It provides me with that itch I still need to scratch."

Hopkins also has to scratch the itch to separate himself from the two fighters who were reaping the fat paydays and glory when he was toiling in relative obscurity in the 1990s, Roy Jones Jr. and James Toney.

"Roy Jones and James Toney were the

30
Record: 1-0 (1 KO)
KOs Mercado in rematch to win vacant IBF title

31
Record: 3-0 (3 KOs)
Makes first three of division-record 20 successful defenses

32
Record: 3-0 (2 KOs)
KOs then-unbeaten Glen Johnson in 11 rounds

33
Record: 1-0 (1 KO and 1 NC)
Pushed through ropes by Mills Lane in no-contest

34
Record: 2-0 (1 KO)
KOs Robert Allen in rematch of no-contest fight

35
Record: 2-0 (1 KO)
KOs Antwun Echols in spite of dislocated shoulder

One of the great moments of Hopkins' career was his victory over Jean Pascal in 2011, which made him the oldest fighter ever to win a major title.
Image: AFP-Getty

48
Record: 0-0
Scheduled to fight IBF titleholder Tavoris Cloud on March 9

47
Record: 0-1 (0 KOs)
Loses majority decision and RING title to Chad Dawson

46
Record: 1-0 (0 KOs and 1 no-contest)
Becomes oldest world champ ever by outpointing Pascal

45
Record: 1-0-1 (0 KOs)
Draws with Jean Pascal for WBC title after outpointing Roy Jones Jr.

44
Record: 1-0 (0 KOs)
Nearly shuts out overmatched Enrique Ornelas

43
Record: 1-1 (0 KOs)
Loses close nod to Joe Calzaghe, then dominates Kelly Pavlik

42
Record: 1-0 (0 KOs)
Ends Winky Wright's unbeaten streak at seven years

41
Record: 1-0 (0 KOs)
Outpoints Antonio Tarver to win RING light heavyweight title

40
Record: 1-2 (0 KOs)
Loses consecutive controversial decisions to Jermain Taylor

39
Record: 2-0 (1 KO)
KOs the biggest star in the sport, Oscar De La Hoya

38
Record: 2-0 (1 KO)
Lands division-record 375 power shots vs. William Joppy

37
Record: 1-0 (1 KO)
Dominates and KOs Carl Daniels in only fight of year

36
Record: 2-0 (1 KO)
KOs Felix Trinidad to win RING belt and unify titles

"You can make money at this or that, but history never goes broke. History outlasts money. You can't spend it all up or act like it don't exist. I'm going against one of the premier, if not the premier, light heavyweights out there. That's the challenge to me. It provides me with that itch I still need to scratch." — Bernard Hopkins

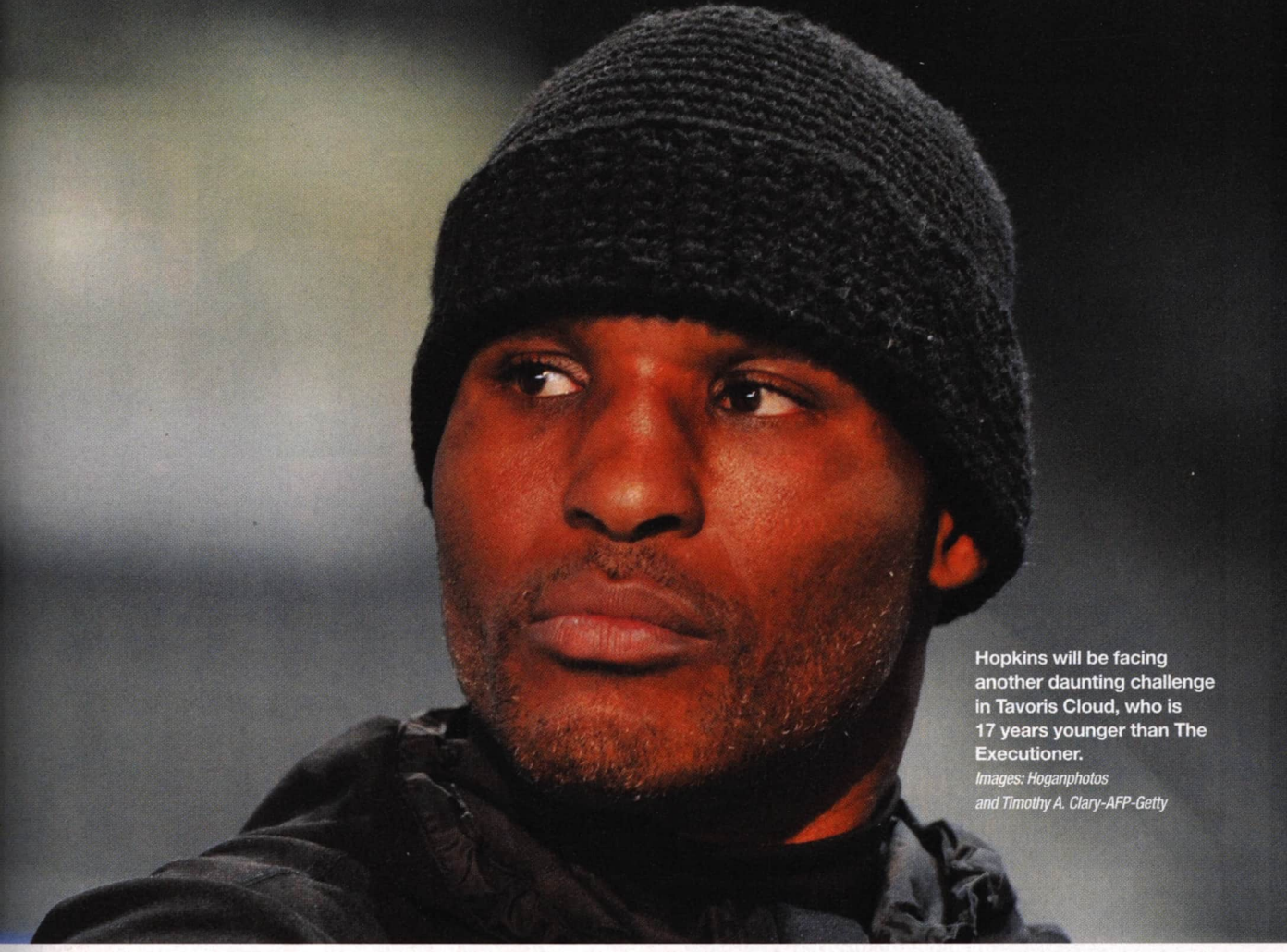
guys," he recalled. "They were getting the big money and HBO dates when I was making title defenses off-TV for, like, $50,000. What Glen is saying now is 100 percent accurate. I call it workman's comp. Any blue-collar worker knows what that is. When people say, `Count your money, you got enough, you should leave,' I think about the times that I fought – and I'm not crying about it or blaming anybody – and didn't get what I felt I deserved.

"Yeah, I finally got there. But I was held back for so long by boxing politics or whatever, because I refused to do what this guy or that guy told me to do when they tried to run my life and my career."

There are those – hey, you know who you are – who will insist that the very best of Jones and the very best of Toney was better than the very best of Hopkins. But even B-Hop's most persistent critics would be obliged to admit that Hopkins' longevity at a world-class level surpasses that of Jones, who, although still active at 43 is a shadow of his onetime luminescence, and Toney, 44, whose brilliance inside the ropes was blunted by his lack of personal discipline outside them. Toney's mother operated a bakery in Michigan, and it must have seemed that her son was her best customer as over time his official weight soared from 157 pounds to 257. Contrast that with Hopkins, who likes to brag that he never had eaten a cookie or a slice of cake for 20 years, a claim that those who know him well swear isn't just hot air.

"It's remarkable," Johnson said of Hopkins' fanatical dedication to staying in peak condition, even when not in training. "It's a tribute to how well he takes care of himself, takes care of his body. That's the difference between Bernard and fighters who use alcohol and drugs, who smoke, who eat too much food and the wrong kind of food. You do any of that and you have your body fighting against itself. It's especially important when you're an older athlete like Bernard. Then again, he's never really done any wrong things as far as taking care of himself, has he?"

But treating your body as a holy shrine can't indefinitely postpone the aging process, and Johnson sees subtle signs that Hopkins, who has dropped hints that he might continue fighting to the absurd age of 50, has lost that proverbial step. Still, B-Hop's mental dexterity at least partially compensates for whatever



Hopkins will be facing another daunting challenge in Tavoris Cloud, who is 17 years younger than The Executioner.
Images: Hoganphotos and Timothy A. Clary-AFP-Getty

physical attributes he has yielded to Father Time.

"The part of Bernard that is still at its best is his mind," Johnson said. "He has a great boxing mind. When I fought him he was much sharper, much quicker, much stronger physically. He was a youthful man, and I wasn't as seasoned and as ready for that fight as I thought I was. I was still learning when I fought Bernard.

"But even now, after all this time, Bernard's mind is still sharp. He knows what he wants to do and he knows his limitations. He knows how to get what he wants, when he wants it."

Hopkins admits to giving some thought to retirement after his last fight, a majority-decision loss to Chad Dawson on April 28 of this past year, which cost him his WBC light heavyweight title. The task then fell to Golden Boy CEO Richard Schaefer to determine if there was another bout out there that would sufficiently pique Hopkins' interest.

CLOUD vs. HOPKINS
WHAT: 12 rounds for Cloud's IBF light heavyweight title
WHEN: March 9
WHERE: Barclays Center, Brooklyn, N.Y.
TV: HBO

"Bernard told me after the Dawson fight that the only reason he would come back would be if there was something to further cement his legacy, something that was historically important," Schaefer said. "Bernard's entire career has been built on putting together events that will stand the test of time. If you're holding all these records, it becomes more and more difficult to trump your own achievements.

"When we were able to reach an agreement with the IBF champion, Tavoris Cloud, it was exactly the kind of challenge that Bernard was looking for."

Hopkins joked that he would have preferred one of the two other alphabet light heavyweight titleholders, Wales' Nathan Cleverly (25-0, 12 KOs), the WBO champion, or Kazakhstan's Beibut Shumenov (13-1, 8 KOs), the WBA titlist, to the 31-year-old Cloud.

"I wanted the youngest guy out of the bunch, but I wound up getting the oldest," cracked Hopkins. "But Cloud is a hard worker, determined, strong mentally and physically. He reminds me of (past Hopkins oppo-

nents) Antwun Echols and Robert Allen – muscular, good puncher, a knock-down, drag-out type. He's going to press me, try to wear me down, try to overpower me. I normally pick those guys apart."

Johnson sees Cloud as just the kind of fighter that Hopkins, at 48, should do very well against. "The one thing Tavoris Cloud has problems with is movement," he said. "In my opinion, the last guy he fought [Gabriel Campillo, whom Cloud beat by a split decision last Feb. 18] beat him with movement. If the guy had been a stronger puncher, Cloud might have found himself on the floor. Fortunately for Cloud, they gave him the decision.

"Bernard, I don't think, is as fast as (Campillo), but he's a master boxer. He moves extremely well for his age. He's going to pick, pick, pick his shots, and I think he's going to be successful."

There's also the matter of additional motivation, another log to toss onto the fire that forever burns within Hopkins. Cloud is promoted by Don King, who used to promote B-Hop and who is still a target of Hopkins' ire. On the night of what many consider to be Hopkins' greatest victory, his 12th-round stoppage of the undefeated and favored Felix Trinidad for the fully unified middleweight championship on Sept. 29, 2011, at Madison Square Garden, King – who also promoted Trinidad – had waved a small Puerto Rican flag and loudly proclaimed, "Viva Puerto Rico!" It was a ritual King had been performing since the matchup was announced.

"He was my promoter, too, and it was obvious he wanted the other guy to win," Hopkins recalled. "The Sugar Ray Robinson Award was to go to the winner, and they had already engraved it with Tito's name! I had to wait almost a week to be presented something they would have handed to (Trinidad) right away if he had won.

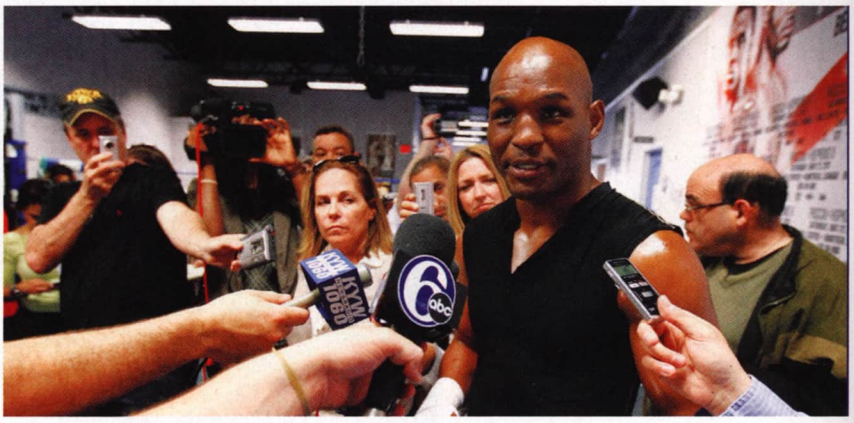


Image: Matt Rourke-Associated Press

Hopkins has always been at home in front of a microphone or tape recorder.

"So now this fight comes along. Cloud believes he is the best, that he can beat anybody. I'm not surprised he took the fight. I am surprised King agreed to it because Cloud losing to me will shut down what's left of King's operation. He's pretty much down to Cloud and Devon Alexander.

"Cloud is Don King's last big hope. Who would have thought I would have stayed around long enough to destroy Don King? I started the process with Tito. Look, I made a history of beating Don King fighters. Robert Allen, John David Jackson, William Joppy, Keith Holmes, Trinidad. That's five so far. There's probably more."

Of course, there is no guarantee that Hopkins will do what he expects to do. Another loss probably would mean a forced end to a nearly 25-year professional run that even Hopkins admits is at a "one-and-done" stage. It seems reasonable to assume that someday Hopkins will go to the well once too often and find that it has run dry. The question is whether or not that day is March 9.

Hopkins, who never has lost inside the distance, gave a clue as to what it might take to permanently exile him from the ring after another Philly fighter and member of Golden Boy's stable, 24-year-old Danny Garcia, had knocked out aging Mexican icon Erik Morales on Oct. 20.

"Now that's the way you put a legend into retirement," Hopkins said of Garcia. "When you're a young champion, you're supposed to make a statement just the way Danny did. I'm 47 years old. If some young guy slayed me the way Danny slayed Morales, maybe I wouldn't still be out there in the mix."

Will Cloud be the man who finally slays B-Hop? Or will he simply be the agent of inevitability representing the natural laws of diminishing returns?

"Tavoris Cloud is going to want to do something to me that nobody's done before," Hopkins said. "I'm a basketball fan. I remember Allen Iverson doing a crossover on Michael Jordan in Washington, when Jordan was in his final season with the Wizards. Michael Jordan, I'm sure, had to know that when AI did that and left him stuck in cement, it probably was time to go.

"At some point, you realize there's nothing left to prove anymore. Once I reach that point, or lose the desire to push myself the way I always have, I'll know it's time to get out. Believe me, I'll know." ■

MOMENTOUS MONTH

JOHNATHON BANKS ENDURED THE DEATH OF MENTOR EMANUEL STEWARD, WORKED WLADIMIR KLITSCHKO'S CORNER IN STEWARD'S PLACE AND UPSET SETH MITCHELL ALL WITHIN A FEW UNFORGETTABLE WEEKS

By: Norm Frauenheim

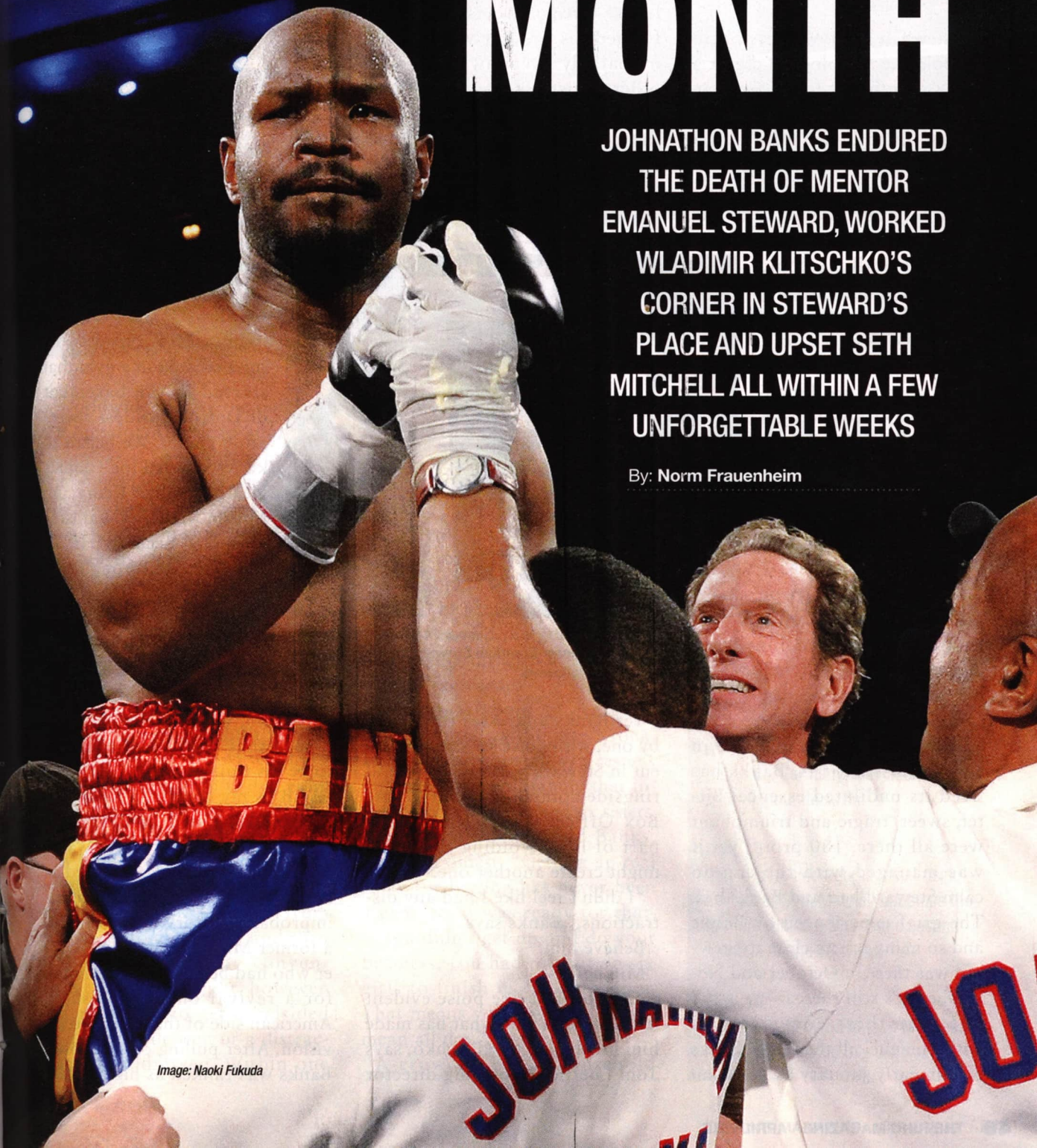


Image: Naoki Fukuda

The timeline from Jack Johnson to Wladimir Klitschko includes Joe Louis, Muhammad Ali, Mike Tyson, Evander Holyfield's ear and layer-upon-layer of legend, lore, film, fiction and fraud. What's left to say? Plenty, it turns out.

Just when heavyweights begin to look like a geological dig or a piece of antiquity in the German wing of a Euro museum, along comes Johnathon Banks with a story that says the division still hasn't done it all.

In a month made for a movie, Banks lived what even Sylvester Stallone could not have imagined in a screenplay for one of those Rocky sequels. Banks lost his trainer and father-figure Emanuel Steward on Oct. 25, moved into Steward's lead role in the corner for Klitschko's decision over Mariusz Wach on Nov. 10 in Hamburg, mourned Steward's death on Nov. 13 at a funeral in Detroit and scored a second-round stoppage of rising contender Seth Mitchell on Nov. 17 in Atlantic City, N.J.

Boxing has been called life in a shot class. If it is, Banks has lived its undiluted essence. Bitter, sweet, tragic and triumphant were all there, 180 proof, yet it was managed with the can-do calm Steward had and Banks has. The grief experienced by Banks and so many others close to Steward was there in October and November. It's still there.

"I have these conversations with Emanuel all the time," Banks said in early January as he began training for a Mitchell rematch on Feb. 16 in Atlantic City. "I always will. His voice has always been there for me. That won't change."

Perhaps that's why Banks, Klitschko's primary sparring partner since 2004, knew almost by instinct how to deal with a collective force of events that transformed his life but would have irreparably swept away so many others. Distractions are a dirty word these days. They've become the modern entourage. As the collection grows, the peril multiplies. That's the prevailing calculation anyway.

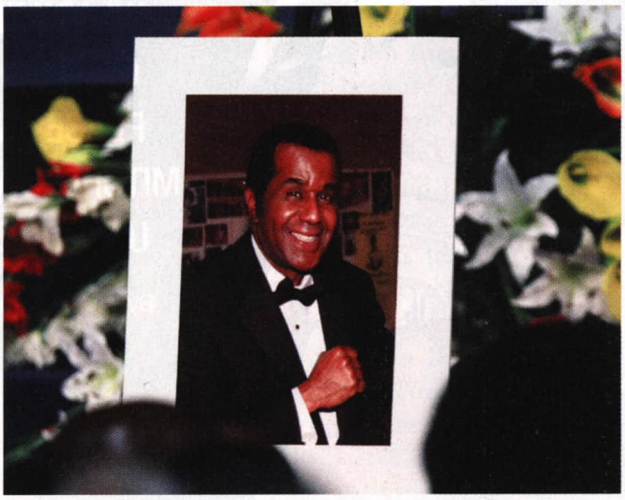


Image: Carlos Osorio-Associated Press

The death of Banks' mentor Emanuel Steward cast a pall over the good fortune that followed.

Yet Banks addresses them, one by one, with poise so often apparent in Steward's corner work and ringside commentary for Home Box Office. Distractions are a part of life. Avoiding them just might create another one.

"I didn't feel like I had any distractions," Banks says.

Believe him.

Mitchell must.

The Steward-like poise evident in Banks is in part what has made him invaluable to Klitschko, says Tom Loeffler, managing director for Wladimir and brother Vitali's promotional company, K2.

"Emanuel was great at telling stories and relating his experiences in boxing to the fighters," Loeffler said. "The one thing I think Johnathon does share with Emanuel is his ability to break down an opponent and create a strategy. That's what he picked up during those many years with Emanuel.

"Johnathon is not as outspoken as Emanuel. At the same time, he has a very calm demeanor about him. I think that's what Johnathon has in the corner. He's able to give instructions without getting too excited. Definitely a lot like Emanuel."

Other than his HBO work, Steward's identity began with Kronk and the stars created in a gym that started in the basement of Detroit's oldest recreation center. We began to know Steward for Thomas Hearns, Hilmer Kenty and Milton McCrory. Banks is poised to become part of that legacy, although in a way with a different dimension.

He already trains a major champion – the heavyweight champ, at that – in Klitschko, who on Nov. 28 confirmed that Banks will continue to be his trainer.

"J.B. is my coach," a Klitschko text message said 18 days after the one-sided victory over Wach.

All the while, Banks emerged as a heavyweight contender with his improbable victory over Mitchell, a former Michigan State linebacker who had begun to stir up hopes for a revival on the vanishing American side of the Klitschko division. After pulling off the upset, Banks was ranked as high as No.

Banks put an emphatic end to the momentum Seth Mitchell had established the past few years.
Image: Naoki Fukuda

3, worldwide. Before the rematch, the race for American supremacy appeared to be down to two: Banks and Deontay Wilder.

Before Banks, there just wasn't an active fighter who trained another fighter with a major title in his own weight class. It's akin to Tom Brady coaching the Atlanta Falcons when he isn't quarterbacking the New England Patriots. Team sports are in a different league in terms of organization and possibilities. But you get the idea. It just wouldn't happen and it didn't, not even throughout more than a century of boxing's usual chaos.

In hindsight, Banks probably would prefer to have done things in reverse order. A career from contender to champion and then trainer would be the conventional path. Hindsight, however, is a good way to get blindsided by a punch not seen or a distraction not addressed. Within one month of dividing his days between work with Klitschko and preparation for Mitchell under the guidance of cornerman and Steward nephew Javan "Sugar" Hill, Banks showed an uncanny ability to deal with things as they happen. Maybe that's just because he grew up. He's 30. Or, maybe, he had the good fortune of growing up with a mentor as wise as Steward.

Banks was about 14 years old when he first walked into Kronk. He remembers himself as a restless kid from a Detroit family that included three brothers and six sisters.

"One bathroom," said Banks, the sixth oldest. "Getting up real early for boxing has never been a problem. I was ready for that. If you didn't get up and do your business, you had to wait on six girls to finish in the bathroom. That means you waited all day, I mean all day."

A crowded Banks household

EVENTFUL PERIOD

Johnathon Banks' life since October.

OCT. 25
Trainer Emanuel Steward, Johnathon Banks' longtime mentor and father figure, dies of diverticulitis and colon cancer in a Chicago-area hospital.

NOV. 10
Banks had been working with Wladimir Klitschko in place of the ailing trainer in Austria and is in the corner when Klitschko faces Mariusz Wach in Hamburg, Germany. Klitschko wins a near-shutout decision.

NOV. 17
Banks is an underdog against rising contender Seth Mitchell but stops the former football player in the second round in Atlantic City, N.J.

FEB. 16
Banks is scheduled to face Mitchell in a rematch in Atlantic City.

Banks made it impossible to overlook him as a contender after his victory over Mitchell. This is the punch that ended the fight.
Image: Naoki Fukuda

BANKS VS. W. KLITSCHKO? NOT LIKELY

Johnathon Banks wants to be a heavyweight champion, but he doesn't foresee a shot at the title in a fight against the champion he trains.

A bout against Wladimir Klitschko in the near future looks to be as unlikely as it would be awkward for Banks, who on paper emerged as a potential challenger for Klitschko's title when he upset Seth Mitchell a week after he moved into Emanuel Steward's role and trained Klitschko for a decision over Mariusz Wach.

"I don't see me fighting Wladimir," said Banks, who became Klitschko's trainer in the wake of Steward's death. "I mean, I'm the trainer for Wladimir."

But interest is already evident. It wouldn't be a surprise if HBO or Showtime offered some serious money for a title fight between the champ and his trainer. Banks has been asked about the possibility a couple of times, including once during a conference call before his Feb. 16 rematch with Mitchell in Atlantic City, N.J.

"That's a question that I really, really have no clue as to the answer," Banks said during the call. "Yes, I am the trainer of Wladimir Klitschko, so a fight with him would be so less likely. But all I can think about is Mitchell. So, to be honest about it, I can't see past that. If I don't go past that, then everything is irrelevant."

Mitchell has been on Klitschko's radar screen for about a year. He saw the former Michigan State linebacker as a way to re-enter the U.S. market. Banks said Klitschko called him after he scored a second-round stoppage of Mitchell.

"Wladimir tells me: 'You messed up my plans,'" said Banks, who began sparring with Wladimir and brother Vitali in 2004. "I said, 'Dude, what you talking about?' He said, 'I wanted to fight Mitchell.' I said, 'Oh, you didn't tell me that. I'm sorry.'

"We said it jokingly. But, yeah, Wladimir wanted to fight Mitchell, because they were naming him the No. 1 heavyweight in the country, America's next best thing. That's the only reason he wanted to fight him."

Tom Loeffler, managing director of the Klitschko's K2 promotional company, says there are other opportunities for Banks, who has become more than just Wladimir's primary sparring partner and trainer. Wladimir won't fight Vitali because they're brothers. He might feel the same about a fight with a good friend.

"Johnathon, during his conference

also included a piano. His mom, Charlene, would play hymns on it after singing in a church choir. As a seventh-grader, Banks would play whatever he heard. Before he ever hit a bag, he used his hands to pound on that keyboard. He still might be seated at that piano if not for Kronk, a trademark name now in search of a new location since Steward's death.

The place had its own rhythm in a ritual as old as a speed bag with Steward there in its early days as founder, conductor and composer. Banks was a fascinated teenager, a tireless student drawn to a brilliant teacher.

"I'd see Emanuel when I was in the amateur program," said Banks, who once worked as a bodyguard to Detroit rapper Marshall Mathers, better-known as Eminem. "He always had time for you, especially if you wanted to learn. And I did. Still do. The relationship just evolved. He took me and other young guys on the Kronk team on trips to training camps when he was working with Oscar De La Hoya, Lennox Lewis and other famous champions. For a kid, it was amazing to be there."

It was an education that included some very exotic field trips. Banks said he knew early on that his life, in one way or another, would be in boxing, which is in need of more competent trainers these days than even good heavyweights.

"If I hadn't met Emanuel, I'd still be a fighter," Banks said. "But I wouldn't know the things I do now. Emanuel has this way about him. It was always: Move forward, move forward. He'd say you can't waste time with what has already happened."

Moving forward, of course, changed for Banks because of all that happened in October and November.

"My life changed completely," he said.

One of the goals hasn't. Banks prides himself on his knowledge of history, which is Boxing 101 for work as a trainer. Name the era, and Banks can talk about the fights and fighters. He goes on and on about Jack Johnson almost as if Johnson is still fighting today.

The heavyweights, of course, get most of his attention. His job as Klitschko's trainer and his newfound role as an emerging contender demand it. Picking an all-time Top 10 isn't so easy. But home dictates the No. 1 pick.

"Joe Louis," Banks said.

Nothing, not even time or the NHL's Red Wings, seems to have

call, really gave the best answer," Loeffler said. "He's focused on the Seth Mitchell fight. What happens after that remains to be seen.

"From a business standpoint, there are so many other high-profile fights for Johnathon. I think we can make some interesting fights for him, especially if he beats Seth Mitchell twice on HBO. That would open up a lot more doors for him. Plus, on Wladimir's side, there are lot of mandatories coming up."

Loeffler said a possibility for Banks would be a rematch with Tomasz Adamek, who beat him as a cruiserweight. Loeffler also mentioned Tyson Fury, Chris Arreola and Robert Helenius.

"It's a good position for him to be in," Loeffler said.

— *Norm Frauenheim*

Image: Joern Pollex-Bongarts-Getty

Banks pulled double duty by filling in for Steward as Wladimir Klitschko's trainer for the Ukrainian's fight against Mariusz Wach.

eroded Louis' status as Detroit's defining athlete. Henry Ford built Motown. The Temptations and Four Tops gave it soul. But the city's heart, all 8,000 pounds of it, hangs from a metal pyramid in a downtown plaza named, appropriately enough, Hart. It's a 24-foot-long bronze sculpture of Louis' right fist.

Banks was born after Louis died in 1981. He never met the heavyweight icon. But he knows the stories and has talked to the people who knew him, including Steward. The monument was built five years after Banks was born. It's been interpreted in countless ways over the last 25 years.

It's a symbol for racial justice and has even attracted sad remnants of injustice. In 2004, two men covered it in white paint and left a sign that said "Courtesy of Fighting Whities." Such courtesy was even an insult to Max Schmeling, the heavyweight from Nazi Germany who lost to Louis, later his friend, in a 1938 rematch that became a symbol for the gathering storms of a world war. Louis, the man, is long gone. As a lightning rod, however, he is as current as ever.

Banks looks at that suspended fist today and sees a demand for a successor.

"I'm trying to be the first heavyweight champ from Detroit since Joe Louis," Banks said. "I'm trying.

It's a quest preceded by inevitable skepticism. There are doubts about Banks' chin, which looked vulnerable in 2006 when he was on the canvas twice before pulling himself up and together for a fourth-round stoppage of Eliseo Castilllo in New York. In 2009, he suffered a tough loss, an eighth-round TKO, at the hands of Tomasz Adamek. Going into the sixth round, Banks led on the scorecards. Emboldened, he grew more aggressive and paid for it, first by body blows in the seventh and then by a straight left in the eighth that ended it in Adamek's favor.

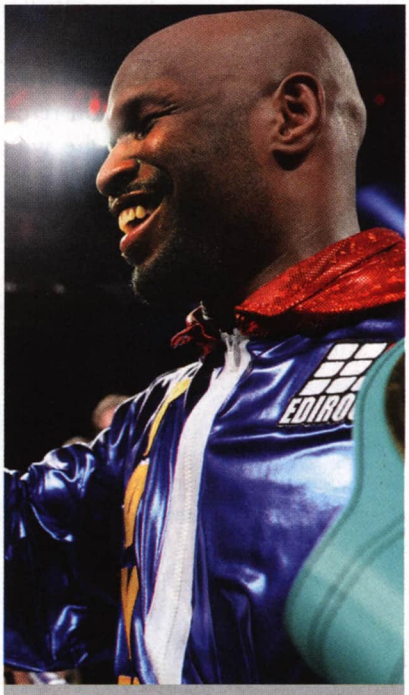


Image: Naoki Fukuda

"If I hadn't met Emanuel, I'd still be a fighter. But I wouldn't know the things I do now. Emanuel has this way about him. It was always: Move forward, move forward. He'd say you can't waste time with what has already happened."

— Johnathon Banks

In both bouts, Banks was a cruiserweight, which has left further doubts about whether he can withstand heavyweight power. Since the Adamek loss, the 6-foot-3 Banks has been a heavyweight in 10 straight fights, which includes nine victories, a draw and five stoppages. For each, he has weighed between 218 and 227 pounds.

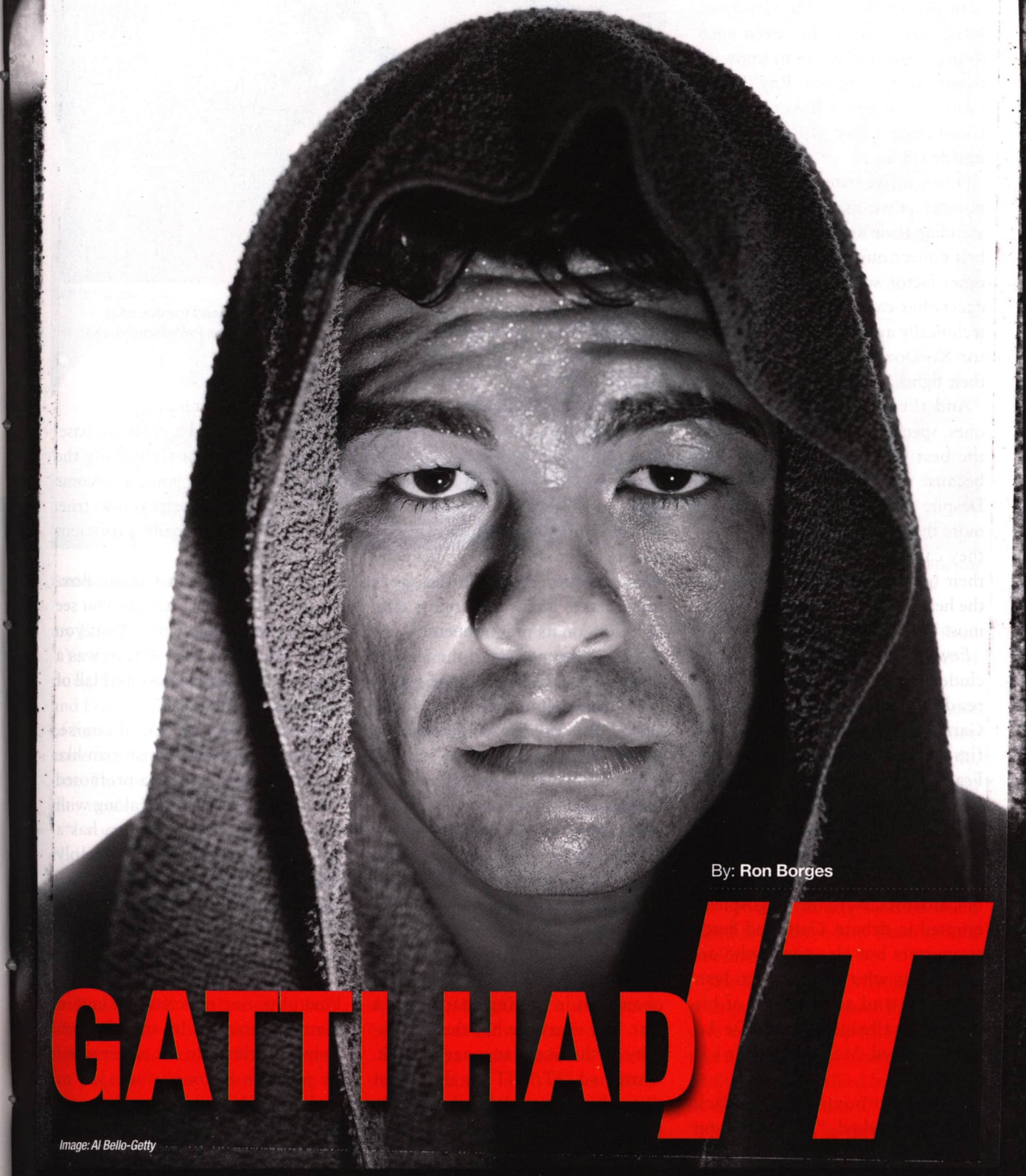
More telling, however, are the rounds he has sparred with the best heavyweights of the time, Wladimir and Vitali Klitschko. Wladimir is listed at 6-6 and fights at between 240 and 250 pounds. Vitali is listed at 6-7 and fights at between 243 and 252 pounds. Both are bigger than Banks and more skilled than anyone on his resume or throughout the remains of what was once boxing's flagship division.

"I've been around Wladimir more than anyone else, other than Emanuel," Banks said. "Wladimir and I always talked boxing together. We had a relationship that started in 2004. We started sparring together. We've probably sparred with each other more than anyone else. We've gone eight rounds one day, 10 rounds the next. We've spent a lot of time together."

In some sense, perhaps, they've become each other's trainer in a larger fight to carry on the life lessons and ring skill taught by Steward. He moved on, but not without a plan to move forward with a whole new story from a division that might prove to be more resilient than dormant. If so, one incredible month from Banks might wind up being something more.

Something like Chapter One. ■

WE CAN DEBATE WHETHER 'THUNDER' HAD HALL OF FAME-CALIBER ABILITY BUT THERE ARE OTHER MEASURES OF GREATNESS



By: **Ron Borges**

GATTI HAD IT

Image: Al Bello-Getty

Some men enter the International Boxing Hall of Fame by acclamation, the door swinging open for them the moment they are first eligible to scale prize fighting's Mt. Olympus. Most fight fans do not even need to hear their full name to know of whom we speak: Sugar Ray (I). Ali. Louis. Dempsey. Chavez. Hagler. Duran. Sugar Ray (II). Rocky. Homicide Hank.

Others arrive based solely on their numbers, their many victories transcending their few defeats and their belt collections overwhelming any other factor, such as stylistic preferences that caused all but the most technically appreciative fan to reach for No-Doz to get through one of their fights.

And then there are the special ones, special not because they were the best boxers of their time but because most often they were not. Despite those flaws, they captured more than a title or two. Most of all they captured hearts, the hearts of their opponents and even more so the hearts of the people who matter most in sports: the fans.

Few fighters in history can be included in that latter category more readily than Arturo "Thunder" Gatti, an apt nickname for a face-first stylist with a heart, as Joe Frazier would put it, "That don't pump Kool-Aid."

When it was announced recently that Gatti would be in the IHOF's latest class of inductees on June 7 in Canastota, N.Y., the blogosphere erupted in debate. Gatti had fierce supporters but also some who argued a guy who loses twice to Ivan Robinson and arguably all of his biggest challenges (Oscar De La Hoya, Floyd Mayweather Jr.) is suspect.

As Buffalo boxing maven Rick Glazer remarked, "He never won a fight he wasn't supposed to win."

Image: THE RING

Arturo Gatti was only 22 when he and Tracy Harris Patterson posed for this shot before their fight in 1995. Gatti won a unanimous decision to take Patterson's junior lightweight title, Gatti's first of two.

Well, most of the people making that argument must have never seen him fight. Or, if they did, they must not understand that Arturo Gatti was the embodiment of what brings people to boxing and what keeps them there even though the sport often makes life as hard on its fans as it does on its practitioners.

"Not everyone gets to the Hall of Fame simply because of the greatness of their numbers," said longtime HBO Boxing commentator Larry Merchant, whose erudite musings lifted HBO Sports from cable unknown to televised champion of boxing over the past 35 years.

"Some get there because they have made fans and kept fans and that has its own value. Boxing is not like other sports in a lot of ways and that's one of them.

"It's always been easier to be a champion in boxing than to be a star. Not everyone has the personality or the body language to do it. Gatti had "IT." "IT" is that most difficult thing to define but something we know when we see it. In him we saw it often.

"If you can build a great fan base, even if you are not technically the most skilled fighter, you can become a star and the opposite is also true. You can be technically proficient but not a star.

"When you watch Classic Boxing on ESPN how often do you see Pernell Whitaker fights? What you see is Thunder Gatti. Arturo was a star. Now he's going into the Hall of Fame and that's great."

Not everyone agrees, of course, but even a purist and historian like J Russell Peltz, who co-promoted Gatti most of his career along with Dan Duva at Main Events, has a soft spot for him and not simply because he made money with him.

When it comes to the historic purity of the sport, Peltz can be a hardcore critic. He believes greatness is limited to the few, and favored the kind of testing matches that landed Gatti his first loss by split decision only six fights into his career when he put him in tough for a kid of such limited experience with a cutie named King Solomon at the legend-

Image: Al Bello-Getty

Gatti will be remembered most for his savage trilogy against Micky Ward (left) in 2002 and 2003. The photo is from the last fight.

ary Blue Horizon in Philadelphia.

Yet in Gatti's case he sees the same thing that made Rocky Graziano and Danny "Little Red" Lopez Hall of Famers and one day may do the same for Ray "Boom Boom" Mancini. They made great fights because they made dramatic fights.

"I voted for him because it's the Hall of FAME," Peltz said. "He was the franchise in later years. He wasn't the most talented fighter, as he'd be the first to admit, but he was special.

"He was selling out 16,000 seats at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City when so-called more-talented fighters couldn't. The Miss America pageant wasn't even selling it out any more. The place was cavernous but he kept filling it when few others could.

"He could do it because he was as exciting losing as he was winning. Fans came because they loved him and they knew they would be entertained. You had to shoot him to beat him ... twice."

Gatti (40-9, 31 knockouts) fought professionally for 16 years and won two world titles, the IBF junior lightweight title in 1995 and the WBC junior welterweight title nearly a decade later, in 2004. He was 7-2 in world title fights and one of the losses was to Floyd Mayweather Jr. in 2005, at a time when Gatti was already fading.

But what truly made his case is that four times in his career RING selected him as half of the Fight of the Year (1998, 1999, 2002, 2003) and he won only two of the four. He also fought in the Round of the Year three times.

Almost without fail each of those fights resulted in Gatti being at one point or another in deep trouble, rising off the deck to win or battling with closed eyes, bloody cheeks and swollen lips.

His essence is captured in one memory his long-time manager, Pat Lynch, instantly recalled when asked to describe how Gatti should be remembered.

"He lost to Angel Manfredy (after relinquishing the junior lightweight title and moving up to 135 for the first time) in a fight where he got cut badly early but rallied back the way he did so many times," Lynch said. "He was down in the third round

and had a terrible cut over his left eye but he was coming back. He won a couple rounds in a row but the doctor stopped it because the bleeding was so bad.

"Arturo was so mad he wouldn't even let (cut man) Joe Souza work on it in the corner after the stoppage. He kept walking away, cursing. He couldn't believe they stopped it. He felt the fight had just started. I finally told him, 'Arturo, that cut is all the way to the bone.' He looks at me and says, 'That's right. It can't go no deeper!' That's the way he was.

"He never won the real, real big one but he meant so much to the sport. He stood for something. He was the rare exception who could lose a fight and HBO would bring him back because he brought so much to an event.

"There was no quit in that guy. Fans felt he was like them: a working class guy. He'd fight on a Saturday, and Monday I'd have calls all day asking when he was going to fight again. The swelling wouldn't have gone down yet on his face!"

Gatti first became a legend when he rallied despite being half-blinded by Wilson Rodriguez, knocking him out with a massive left hand with 44 seconds left in the sixth round in his first defense of the 130-pound title. A couple rounds earlier, his right eye nearly swollen shut, Gatti had responded to the ringside physician's televised instruction to cover his left eye by saying "I'm all right!"

When the doctor threatened to stop the fight if he didn't cover his left eye and tell him how many fingers he saw with his right, Gatti covered it with his glove and then, as the doctor put up two fingers, took it down and said "Two!" Fans loved him for it.

Four fights later he would win again in a similarly desperate circumstance against Gabriel Ruelas, a former champion himself who had wobbled Gatti badly with several deadly uppercuts, sliced open his left cheek and had that problematic right eye closing when Gatti began to stand toe to toe and hurt Ruelas to the body.

"All out war!" HBO analyst Roy Jones Jr. roared in the midst of the fifth round, just before Gatti stopped Ruelas with a stunning left hook and then collapsed on his knees in the neutral corner, weeping in joy and bloody relief.

Those fights and many others like them not only made Gatti the stuff of legend but also the staple of a new series called *Boxing After Dark* that HBO started in the mid-1990s to try and revive what had become a fading sport at all but the most elite levels. Gatti's place in that, Merchant argues, cemented his deserved place in Canastota as well.

"He was one of the guys who made Boxing After Dark and that series was very important because it showed people who maybe had forgotten that you could make

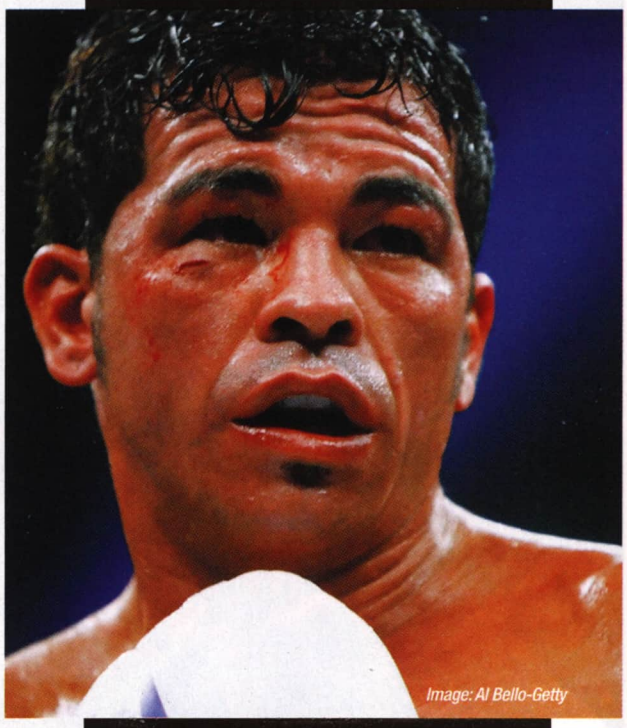


Image: Al Bello-Getty

"There was no quit in that guy. ... He'd fight on a Saturday, and Monday I'd have calls all day asking when he was going to fight again. The swelling wouldn't have gone down yet on his face!"

— Pat Lynch, manager

great fights out of guys you maybe hadn't heard of yet," Merchant said.

"He wasn't on the highest level of the sport but he was certainly a reflection of the sport. One thing about that show when Arturo Gatti fought on it you were pretty much guaranteed to see drama and blood fighting and that led to a re-energizing of the levels below the heavyweight division and the pay-per-view fighters at a difficult time for boxing. Frankly that, in itself, was a palpable contribution to the sport."

Yet those are not even the fights for which Gatti is best remembered. Those belong to him and a tough journeyman named Micky Ward. Between them they shared 30 rounds. Each of their three fights was a Promethean battle against not only each other but also enormous pain, creating what is considered one of the best trilogies in boxing history.

Gatti won two of the three, splitting the two that were chosen Fight of the Year. And, in the loss, he appeared to be finished after Ward's body attack finally seemed to beat the life out of him. Ward's corner thought the fight had been stopped by Gatti's deeply worried trainer Buddy McGirt and began celebrating but Gatti not only answered the bell for 10th, he somehow won the round.

Didn't matter to Gatti what McGirt, Ward or anyone else thought. He fought on and so did Ward. Because of it, the two became etched together in stone. Gatti-Ward is all you have to tell a fight fan to make them smile or to understand what type of fight you're talking about.

Isn't that the true aim of boxing? Isn't it to entertain by taking the measure of another man and in so doing also measuring yourself? Arturo Gatti, who died too young under suspicious cir-

CLASS OF 2013

Those who will be inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame this year.

MODERN

ARTURO GATTI

Record: 40-9 (31 KOs)
Active: 1991-2007
Summary: The two-time titleholder was one of the most-beloved boxers of his era because of his fighting spirit. He was in four RING Magazine Fights of the Year.

VIRGIL HILL

Record: 50-7 (23 KOs)
Active: 1984-2007
Summary: The light heavyweight and cruiserweight held a major title in 16 of 21 years between 1987 and 2007, including 11 consecutive years between 1987 and 1997.

MYUNG-WOO YUH

Record: 38-1 (14 KOs)
Active: 1982-93
Summary: The two-time junior flyweight titleholder from South Korea had a division-record 17 successful defenses in his dominating first reign, which lasted six years.

OLD-TIMER

JEFF SMITH

Record: 88-12-3 (48 KOs)
Active: 1910-27
Summary: The clever middleweight never won a world championship but beat a number of all-time greats and, known as the "Bayonne Globetrotter," would fight anyone anywhere.

WESLEY RAMEY

Record: 140-28-12 (11 KOs)
Active: 1929-41
Summary: The "Uncrowned Lightweight Champion" never fought for a world title but defeated a number of world champions, including all-time great Tony Canzoneri.

NON-PARTICIPANT

MILLS LANE

Summary: Lane was perhaps the most-respected referee of his time because of his no-nonsense mentality, sound judgment and integrity.

JIMMY LENNON JR.

Summary: The golden-voiced ring announcer is arguably the best in the business. He followed in the formidable footsteps of his father, announcer Jimmy Lennon Sr.

ARTURO "CUYO" HERNANDEZ

Summary: One of the most-respected Mexican managers handled the likes of Carlos Zarate, Ricardo Lopez, Ruben Olivares and Alexis Arguello, among many others.

OBSERVER

COLIN HART

Summary: The Londoner earned the reputation as one of the top boxing writers in the world over a journalism career that lasted a half century.

TED CARROLL

Summary: The prolific artist's classic cartoons graced the pages of THE RING Magazine and other publications for many years.

PIONEER

JOE COBURN

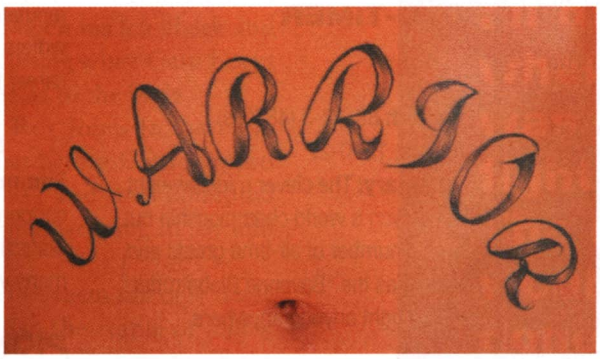
Summary: The Irish-born New Yorker was one of the top bare-knuckle fighters in the mid-19th century. He reportedly never lost a fight.

Images: Al Bello-Getty

Above, Gatti (left) was as game as ever but his skills had eroded when he was stopped in seven rounds by Alfonso Gomez in 2007. Gatti never fought again. Below, a tattoo on Gatti's belly said it all.

cumstances 3½ years ago at 37, was rewarded with fistic immortality for being perhaps the king of taking such measurements.

Next June he will enter a hallowed place, not at center stage perhaps but where he truly belongs: the place that houses the greatest FIGHTERS of all time as well as the greatest boxers.



What is sad is not that Gatti was selected even though Peltz admits "it may be the most controversial selection in the history of the Hall of Fame." What is sad is that he won't be there to share it with the fans who loved him so completely, not because he was the perfect fighting machine but because he triumphed even though he wasn't.

"Arturo was a hard guy," Lynch said. "Maybe he wasn't the most talented guy but the most talented guys knew if they got in with him they'd have to go through hell to beat him. He wasn't the greatest fighter but he made the greatest fights.

"In those days you usually had to win your fights to keep your contract with HBO. They had a clause in the contracts with all their fighters that if they lost, the contract was voided.

"They had it in Arturo's contract too but it never seemed to matter. HBO never enforced it. It was in his contract for the Manfredy fight when they stopped it on that cut. Next fight was RING's Fight of the Year and he lost it. Six years later he won another world championship. In between HBO kept showing him because the fans wanted to see him. They knew what they were getting: a fighter. That was Arturo Gatti.

"He used to ask me from time to time, 'Do you think I'll get in?' You could tell how proud he would be and how much he would have enjoyed it."

Probably about as much as the fans whose love put him there enjoyed him. ■

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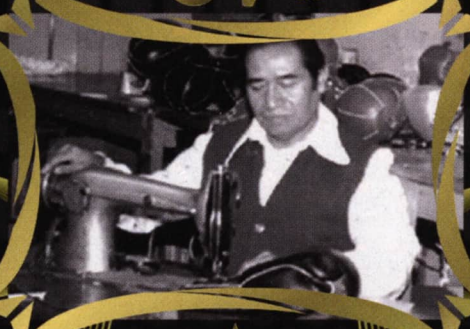

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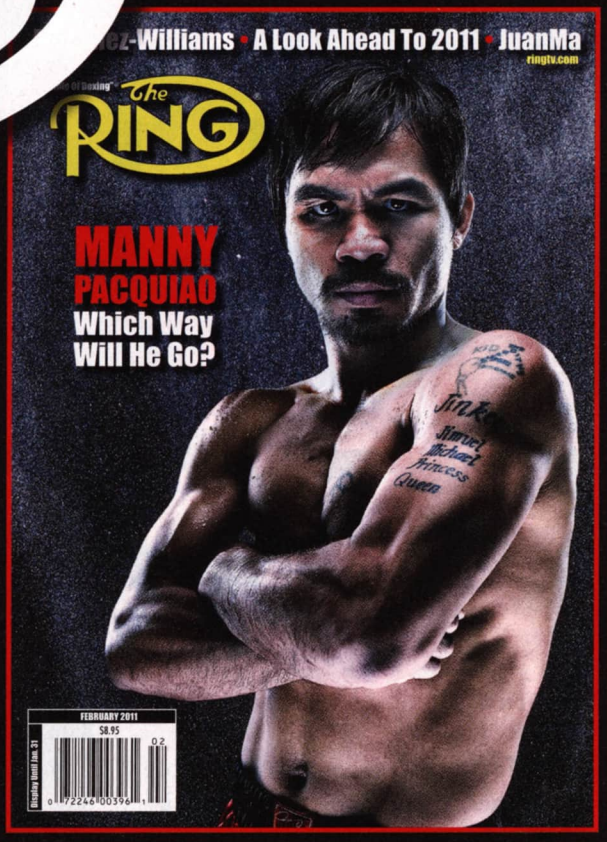

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BARRY BONDS AND ROGER CLEMENS WERE KEPT OUT OF THE BASEBALL HALL OF FAME THIS YEAR BECAUSE OF THEIR PERCEIVED CONNECTION TO PEDS. HOW WILL THIS PLAY OUT IN BOXING?

WILL CHEATERS PROSPER?

By: **Don Stradley**

Charles "Kid" McCoy, a fabled fighter from boxing's antediluvian days, was once caught by the handlers of Sailor Tom Sharkey in the act of loading his gloves. According to the folklore, Sharkey's men entered McCoy's dressing room just as a chunk of plaster fell out of his glove and hit the floor. The story might have a grain of truth in it for McCoy was a notorious cheater. Yet, when people have written about McCoy over the years, they've described him as "colorful" or "a rascal," as if busting a guy in the head while his glove was packed with concrete was just good old-fashioned fun, the way grandpa used to do it. But McCoy's antics, which included a couple of apparent fixed fights, his brother squirting ammonia into the eyes of an opponent and a seven-year prison stretch for manslaughter, didn't prevent a posthumous induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 1991.

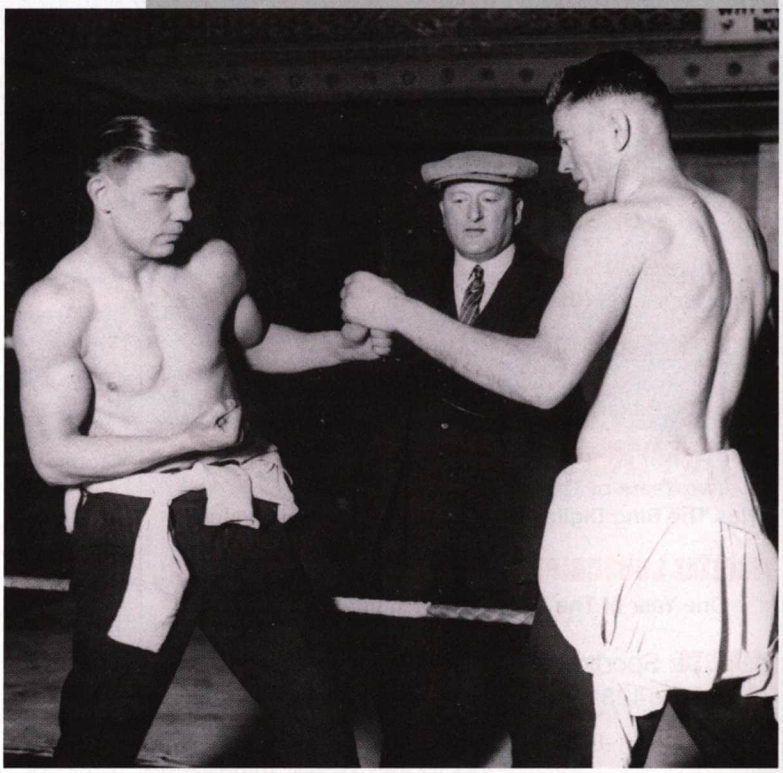

Image: THE RING

Harry Greb (left, sizing up Gene Tunney) might be described as a cheater because of his dirty tactics. Fighters in a later generation would turn to science to gain an advantage.

Antonio Tarver (pictured as his fight against Lateef Kayode ended) was a borderline Hall of Famer before he tested positive for steroids. Will that hurt his chances of being inducted?

Image: Jae C. Hong-Associated Press

Image: Chris Trotman-Getty

James Toney (left, fighting John Ruiz) failed two drug tests but his strong resume could sway Hall of Fame voters.

Cheaters in boxing have always benefited from the kindness of fans and writers alike. Harry Greb and Fritzie Zivic are generally regarded as the two dirtiest fighters in history, yet all of their underhanded tactics seem to endear them to historians. Both Greb and Zivic are in the IBHOF.

Jump ahead, valued readers, to the modern era, when cheaters are more likely to put illegal chemicals in their bodies than plaster in their gloves. The latest way for fighters to cheat involves performance enhancing drugs, or PEDs. Some top fighters have been connected to PEDs, including Shane Mosley, James Toney, and most recently, Antonio Tarver. There are others – lately it seems we have a new offender every few weeks – but the trio of Tarver, Mosley, and Toney is of particular interest. At some point in the future they will be eligible for induction into the IBHOF. Will their respective PED scandals be a stumbling block? Or will they continue the tradition of "dirty" fighters getting into Canastota?

"I will not vote for proven PED users," said Showtime's Steve Farhood, a member of the IBHOF's voting panel. "Every fighter who steps through the ropes is risking his life. An unfair advantage in physical strength or conditioning can potentially result in serious injury or tragedy. But I don't think most of my colleagues will follow suit. I fear I'll be in the minority on this issue."

Farhood was one of the few voters willing to discuss the matter. Some said they would only talk off the record; others said they would deal with it on a case by case basis. Carlo Rotella, a Hall of Fame voter who has written about boxing for *The New York Times*, admitted to THE RING, "I really don't have any clear picture of this issue yet."

If Tarver, Mosley, and Toney were baseball players, there would be some stiff debate about their being enshrined at Cooperstown. That became obvious on Jan. 9, when voters kept Barry Bonds, Roger Clemens and other players with eye-popping statistics out of the National Baseball Hall of Fame because they have been connected with PEDs.

But boxing and baseball are as different as Lindsay Lohan and Anne Hathaway. For one thing, steroid use has an impact on the holiest of baseball staples – statistics and milestones, such as 600 home runs or 300 wins. Boxing isn't driven as much by stats. Also, the Baseball Hall of Fame has a kind of gravitas that the IBHOF lacks. Major League Baseball happens also to be a corporate entity like Disney, marketing itself as family entertainment. Boxing, once described by Jimmy Cannon as "the red-light district of sports," has no family image to protect. Red Smith once wrote that "anything short of pulling a knife is regarded indulgently" in boxing. By the way, Smith and Cannon loved boxing.

If some of the IBHOF voters we canvassed are hesitant to take a hard line on the subject, it could be because many of them came of age during the PED boom, a time when even teen girls use PEDs for middle school field hockey. Some voters aren't sure PEDs are particularly helpful in boxing, especially where Tarver, Mosley, and Toney are concerned.

"Are these three guys really good examples of the use of performance enhancing drugs?" asked Rotella. "Size-enhancing, and therefore profit-enhancing, yes, but performance? In Toney's case, it appears to have hurt him – literally – rather than helping. In Mosley's, he got bigger, but better? And Tarver, well, I don't think I was likely to vote for him anyway. So you're really asking about Mosley, and my question back to you is: Did doing any of that stuff make him anything other than bigger? The tradeoff for a non-heavyweight seems like a bad deal: You get bigger and bench-press stronger, but it takes you up in weight class, and, potential cash value aside, that's usually a negative."

Mosley claimed to be an unwitting victim in a 2003 doping regimen created by vilified BALCO chief Victor Conte. Toney was popped twice for PED use, once in 2005 and again in 2007. After his first bust, Toney said his tests were affected by drugs given to him for an arm injury. He dismissed his second failed test by claiming someone meddled with his water bottle. Toney's opponent in the second bout, Danny Batchelder, failed his steroid test, too. Tarver tested positive for a steroid in June 2012; one of boxing's genuinely nice guys, he maintains his innocence. Tarver's trainer, Buddy McGirt, blames the self-proclaimed gym gurus that have

NOTABLE PED BUSTS

Tarver, Mosley, and Toney aren't alone. Here are 10 fighters associated with PEDs. At least a few of them might be up for IBHOF consideration in the future.

FRANZ BOTHA, 1995 — Tested positive for steroids and was later stripped of the IBF heavyweight title.

ROY JONES JR., 2000 — Tested positive for androstenedione, but claimed it was because he had taken an over-the-counter supplement called Ripped Fuel. His opponent Richard Hall also failed his drug test. The results were not immediately revealed to the public.

FERNANDO VARGAS, 2002 — Suspended for nine months and fined $100,000 for testing positive for the steroid stanozolol.

ORLANDO SALIDO, 2006 — After outpointing Robert Guerrero to win the IBF featherweight belt, Salido's postfight urinalysis revealed the presence of nandrolone.

MARIANO CARRERA, 2006 — Tested positive for clenbuterol following his WBA junior middleweight title victory over Javier Castillejo.

ANDRE BERTO, 2012 — While preparing for a rematch with Victor Ortiz, Berto tested positive for nandrolone.

ALI ADAMS, 2012 — Adams tested positive for stanozolol and was banned in England for two years.

LAMONT PETERSON, 2012 — Tested positive for synthetic testosterone. He claimed his doctor prescribed it because of his low testosterone levels.

ERIK MORALES, 2012 — When Morales tested positive for clenbuteral prior to a rematch with Danny Garcia, he claimed he had eaten some tainted meat.

LARRY OLUBAMIWO, 2012 — Olubamiwo was banned for four years after a test revealed the blood-boosting drug EPO. He admitted to using 13 different illegal substances during his career, including human growth hormone and anabolic steroids.

Antonio Tarver might not even be considered for the Hall of Fame if he were a baseball player.
Image: Jae C. Hong-Associated Press

infested boxing ever since cruiserweight Evander Holyfield sought fame and fortune in the heavyweight class.

"These guys call themselves strength and conditioning guys," McGirt said in an interview with ProBoxingInsider.com. "And they give all kinds of drinks. ... I think maybe he [Tarver] took something he didn't know."

McGirt's passive position is disturbing. Are fighters and trainers really oblivious to what is going on? There is a sense here that we are being played by a group that has silently agreed to their own version of "don't ask, don't tell." Are they simply taking whatever is offered by some fast-talker in sweat pants, knowing they can plead ignorance if something illegal turns up on a drug test?

PED use in boxing could be the biggest problem the sport has faced since the days when organized crime dominated the business. Mob influence lasted from the late 1920s to the 1950s, until several fighters and managers confessed in 1960 before a U.S. senate sub-committee that gangsters controlled many aspects of boxing, including what matches were made, and even results. It was during these sessions that Jake LaMotta admitted to taking a dive against "Blackjack" Billy Fox. La Motta's confession backfired on him, for he spent several years labeled as a man of no integrity who played along with criminals. Over time, though, LaMotta was forgiven. He ended up in the IBHOF.

It is impossible to know how many fighters benefited from mob fixing, just as we might never know how many fighters might have benefited from PEDs.

"I believe that at boxing's top level, PED use is much more prevalent than we might have thought a few years back," Farhood said. "It seems inevitable that certain cheaters will never get caught. Such cheaters, of course, will be considered for the Hall of Fame solely on their accomplishments. Right now, there's not much we can do about that."

Decades ago, casual boxing fans watched boxing with a cynical eye, wondering which fighter

TAINTED HALL OF FAMERS

Here are 10 Hall of Fame fighters with a whiff of dishonor on their records. Like modern PED users, they denied any wrongdoing.

JAMES J. CORBETT
Two late career bouts with Tom Sharkey and Kid McCoy were widely believed to be of the pre-arranged variety.

BOB FITZSIMMONS
Many suspected he loaded his gloves. The allegations were loudest after his second bout with Jim Jeffries.

JOE GANS
Gans took an obvious dive against Terry McGovern in 1900. The suspicious nature of the bout led to boxing being banned in Chicago for more than 20 years.

ABE ATTELL
Attell's favorite trick was to take a dive against an inferior fighter. This paved the way for a rematch, where Attell would win easily and clean up on bets. He pulled the trick off a number of times, but eventually the public grew wise. He later helped fix the 1919 World Series. What a guy.

JACK DEMPSEY
Dempsey was haunted by charges that he wore plaster on his hands during his 1919 championship win over

JESS WILLARD
Those accusations never stuck, but many believe Dempsey threw a fight against Jim Flynn, lying down in one round. He easily beat Flynn in a rematch.

JACK SHARKEY
He never completely shook off rumors that he took a dive against Primo Carnera in 1933.

ROCKY GRAZIANO
After losing twice to Harold Green, Graziano scored a fishy KO win in their third bout. Green confessed years later that gangsters had ordered him to throw the fight.

WILLIE PEP
Pep was suspected of taking a dive against Lulu Perez. It's not out of the realm of possibility: Pep's manager, Lou Viscusi, was a mob lackey, and Pep was a serious gambler.

KID GAVILAN
Judge Artie Schwartz purportedly confessed on his deathbed that mobsters had ordered him to vote score a fight for Gavilan, a mob favorite, in a controversial 1951 bout against Billy Graham.

SONNY LISTON
Liston, who had mob links, was accused of throwing his second bout with Muhammad Ali. More than one opponent complained that Liston's gloves had been smeared with a substance to blind them.

was "in the bag" or which judges were being paid off. We aren't far from that same level of skepticism regarding PED use. For instance, Juan Manuel Marquez's recent knockout win over Manny Pacquiao was marred by the presence of Angel Hernandez, a well-known PED pusher, in Marquez's camp. After the bout, internet message boards were filled with as much speculation about Marquez's bulky new physique as they were about the fight itself. It is unfortunate that a good fight had a shadow over it. It is troubling that we are nearly at the point where we can't discuss boxing without discussing steroids. But it is also wrong to not question things, because the questions are leading to good things, such as the rise of VADA, and Nonito Donaire's efforts to present himself as a clean fighter.

Marquez passed his drug tests, but even if he failed, he could always play the ignorant dupe. Fighters have been very comfortable playing dumb during the steroid era, which is more or less how they acted during the mob days. Then again, we might like our fighters in that role because that makes it easier to forgive them. Forgiveness is a big part of boxing.

A few years ago in this very magazine there was some debate over whether Mike Tyson should be inducted into the IBHOF. After all, Tyson spent much of his career as an embarrassment to boxing. When asked about inducting a reprobate like Tyson, IBHOF Executive Director Ed Brophy told THE RING that it was in the hands of the voters, and that's all there was to it. (For the record, I was once a member of the IBHOF voting panel. They send a postcard with some names on it, you check off the names you like and send it back. It's not exactly the Genome Project.) When Tyson was finally eligible for induction, enough time had passed that his bad behavior seemed less significant than it once had. All was forgiven. He sailed into the IBHOF without controversy. His enshrinement became a media event, which is often the IBHOF's goal.

Image: Kevork Djansezian-Associated Press

Shane Mosley (right) narrowly outpointed Oscar De La Hoya in this 2003 fight to win THE RING junior middleweight championship but later admitted he took EPO beforehand.

Regarding PED users, Brophy told THE RING that no special policies or restrictions would be created by the IBHOF. The elections would be in the hands of voters, as they always have been.

"Truthfully, the subject hasn't come up," Brophy said. "If it has, we certainly didn't discuss it to any great degree."

By the time Mosley, Toney, and Tarver are eligible, their PED scandals might seem like old news. Maybe one, or all three, will be inducted. Their inductions will be touching and memorable. They will take part in the motorcade, and spectators will cheer and try to touch them as they go by. The IBHOF is a feel-good place. As Brophy told us recently, the IBHOF is about "keeping the romance of boxing alive."

For now, PEDs will not cast a cloud over those sunny summer days in Canastota. But maybe one day we'll hear from a disgruntled gym rat who says he supplied steroids to fighters who have already been inducted. Or maybe a contemporary version of LaMotta will admit that he got away with using steroids because his promoter paid to have his tests fixed. The enormity of such announcements might be what it takes to stir things up. ■

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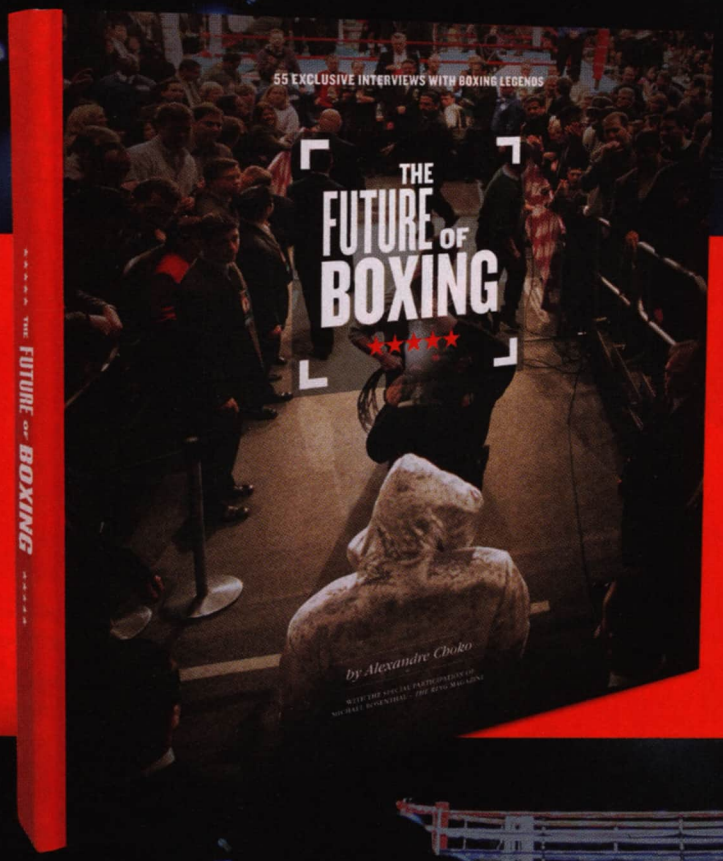

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Image: Emily Harney

The Rodriguezes are a fairly carefree family these days but, in light of harrowing challenges, that wasn't always the case.

little WARRIORS

EDWIN RODRIGUEZ EXCHANGES PUNCHES FOR A LIVING BUT IT'S HIS 6-YEAR-OLD TWINS, FAMILIAR WITH PAIN THROUGHOUT THEIR YOUNG LIVES, WHO ARE THE FAMILY HEROES

By: **Ron Borges**

By any measureable standard but his own, Edwin Rodriguez is a fighter. He is in fact one of the best super middleweights in the world, a fighter hovering on the edge of his moment. Yet when he hears that title ascribed to himself, Rodriguez has to laugh.

In his family, you see, he may be The Boxer but he is not The Fighter. That is a title that belongs only to his son and daughter, 6-year-old twins who have been fighting since the moment they came out of the womb.

Born nearly four months premature and only a few days beyond the cutoff for viability, Serena and Edwin Rodriguez Jr. would spend the first 122 days of their lives in the University of Massachusetts Memorial Medical Center's neonatal intensive care unit in Worcester. For much of that time machines would breathe for them, a situation with painful long-term consequences. But before their parents had time to worry about that, they first had to worry about the short-term fact of two tiny babies facing a daily life-and-death struggle that, frankly, carried with it odds far longer than the ones their father has faced trying to become a world champion.

Labeled "micropreemies," Rodriquez's children weighed only 19 ounces each at birth and almost immediately began to lose weight, Serena at one point dropping below a pound. Their original diapers fit snugly onto a golf ball and their eyelids could not yet even open, fused shut because they were not ready to see the world they had entered so unexpectedly.

Noise was all but forbidden, even a soft lull-a-bye from the voice of Rodriquez's then-fiancée and now wife, Stephanie, because they were so frail even sound could cause life-threatening drops in their oxygen level.

Normally even the healthiest babies cry. It is their first way of communicating. Ones suffering the way Rodriquez's two children were should have wailed but their bodies would not allow them to even whimper. Regardless of what road The Boxer's life would take the great fight of his life had begun: two babies who knew pain before they knew their names; two babies who learned how to fight long before they would know the art their father exhibits inside a boxing ring.

A love story, it seemed, had turned into a tragedy. An Olympic dream had faded. Decisions every parent fears even having to consider were staring back at two 21-year-old kids: a ring of experienced doctors urging Stephanie and Edwin Sr. to accept the sad reality that their son was not going to make it and their daughter was facing a climb so uphill it made Everest look like a knoll.

Image: Emily Harney

Super middleweight contender Edwin Rodriguez holds a treasure – son Edwin Jr. – after a recent fight.

"I knew things were not good," Rodriguez recalled, "but I really believed if I stayed positive, it would be all right. I felt I had to stay strong for Stephanie. I knew things were not good for her ... for any of us. There were times by myself when I broke down and cried. A couple of times I was flat at the bottom.

"We didn't have much hope at times but I tried to stay positive because I knew what the right decision was. So I cried when my wife wasn't looking."

At 21 days Serena needed surgery to close a hole in her heart, a difficult operation requiring general anesthesia. She weighed barely a pound but survived only to have her lungs collapse. With warning signals

Image: Emily Harney

Rodriguez has a lot to smile about, including a devoted wife, two wonderful children and a boxing career on the rise.

screaming, two helpless parents waited for a miracle. They got one. It would not be the last.

Young Edwin's lungs were so poorly developed that those caring for him believed he would not survive. Few micropreemies as dependent on a mechanical oscillator for pumping oxygen to breathe survive long. Barely a month after his birth, which had been the same day as the opening of the National PAL tournament Rodriguez was set to compete in as a qualifier for the 2008 Olympics, doctors at the NICU sat down with Edwin and Stephanie and gave it to them straight: Their son's chances of survival were statistically zero.

As they sat stunned and silent, the Rodriquez family was told in the previous 20 years no baby at UMass Medical Center, a facility designed to care for high-risk neonatal cases, had ever survived after such an extended period on such high oxygen settings on an oscillator. At one point it had been hoped he could begin taking steroids to help his lungs develop but the doctors no longer felt that would be helpful or even possible because an infection had set in.

It was at that moment of utter despair that The Boxer fought for his son. Boxing is the sport of lost causes and denial. It is a place where you fight on long after logic and common sense have refused to support your dreams. The odds against anyone becoming a world champion are so long you can't get action on them in Vegas. The odds of a kid born in poverty in the Dominican Republic emigrating to New England, no boxing hotbed any more, and making it in prize fighting are vastly worse. So Edwin Rodriguez long ago had learned to ignore long odds.

Like most young boxers, he lived in a world of blind optimism and faith in one thing: the words of the old heavyweight champion James J. Corbett.

Corbett was once asked what separated champions from the rest. His reply echoed inside that hospital room.

"You become a champion by fighting one more round," Corbett said as if talking to Edwin and Stephanie Rodriguez. "When things are tough, you fight one more round."

Painful as it had become to watch, that is what The Boxer wanted to ask of his children, his wife, himself and their doctors: Fight one more round. Frankly, his wife didn't really want to hear it.

The choice was not easy and initially Stephanie angrily questioned his blind optimism. A 2005 honors graduate of Holy Cross, where her mother and stepfather taught and worked in the organic chemistry lab, Stephanie Rapa Rodriquez was a well-educated woman on her way to law school after winning an academic scholarship when she became pregnant.

She had fallen in love with a Dominican-born boxer she met while working a legal internship at the Worcester Boys and Girls Club, where he trained. At the time Rodriquez was National Golden Gloves champion and USA Boxing's reigning middleweight champion, someone earmarked for the Olympics in Beijing.

But about the time the PAL qualifying rounds began, his children were born and a real fight began, one more important than gold medals. It was a fight for life and for love, a fight that replaced an Olympic dream with a greater one.

"It was a lot to handle at the time," Rodriguez admits today. "My kids were in the hospital for 122 days. I was supposed to be getting ready for the Olympic Tri-

Images: Gregory Payan-Associated Press and Emily Harney

Above, Rodriguez celebrates after outpointing Don George last year at Madison Square Garden, one of his most-important victories. Below, he unloads on Darnell Boone.

Image: Emily Harney

Rodriguez never stopped believing that his children would overcome daunting medical obstacles.

als. I was supposed to go to the PAL tournament but I didn't go. It was an easy decision.

"I thought it was only the first qualifier, and because I was already on the national team I only had to be in the top eight of a qualifying tournament. But I went to Nationals and lost my second fight right before the top eight. My mentality was just get to the top eight and maybe things would be better with my kids. I didn't feel I had to be at my best and lost to a young kid in a close fight.

"I was supposed to go to the Pan-Am Games but I didn't go. I only went to England for a dual meet because I would have lost my stipend if I didn't. I lost a decision to James DeGale. I was going to the gym, so physically I was there but mentally I wasn't.

"I was at the hospital every day. I only missed one week when I had to go away to fight. In the end I didn't make it, but if I was going to be a husband and a father, I was going to do it not just when it's easy. I was going to do it when things weren't good. When they needed me, I was going to be there.

"I know how it feels to be so close to your dream that you can grab it and you have to let it go, but I know it was the right thing."

One loss brings another gain and so the decision to ignore the doctors and the overwhelming evidence in front of them was made. One day later their son stopped breathing.

A team of doctors, nurses and a therapist labored over Edwin Jr. as Stephanie lay shocked and fearful. She called Edwin, who was not in the hospital at the time. By the time he arrived the medical team had taken his son off the breathing machine and had begun manually inflating his lungs. The sky was darkening around them.

Then, just as Corbett suggested long ago, tiny Edwin Jr. made a champion's decision. He fought one more round. Not only did his oxygenation numbers begin to rise but his lung infection disappeared, meaning he might soon be strong enough to face the same heart surgery his sister had undergone.

The long-term prognosis was still not good. He was off the mat but still wobbly, feeling life's punches slamming in on him in blinding flurries. The doc-

tors doubted he would survive the surgery that he desperately needed. The Boxer believed otherwise, of course.

"I kept telling everyone it would be all right," Rodriguez said. "Stephanie got upset with me a few times. She wanted to know why we were doing this. Why we were putting our son through this. She reminded me of the things we knew: that even if he survived he wouldn't be able to do normal things. He wouldn't walk. Other things.

"I didn't care. He was my son and I would love him no matter what."

Eventually the same will that has Rodriguez ranked No. 2 in the world by the WBC and in the Top 10 of every major rating organization prevailed. Barely a month old, The Fighter went by ambulance to Children's Hospital in Boston to face surgery. It was successful and several days later he was in an ambulance returning to Worcester when, inexplicably, the vehicle suffered a power loss halfway through the trip and his ventilator had to be put on a backup battery.

Was there no end to this fight? Was there no cosmic referee to at least keep it fair? How much more could even a fighter such as this boy take?

After a change of ambulances, Edwin Jr. returned safely to the only home he'd known, the neonatal care unit in Worcester, where things would begin to stabilize ... until they didn't.

Soon he faced a rolling series of what are known as "death spells" caused by bronchial spasms that prevent air from entering the lungs. Often his heart would stop, the baby turning blue before he was brought back to life, but to what kind of life?

This would happen five times in a 10-day span. Each time The Fighter got off the floor and fought back, finally stabilizing to the point where both he and his sister became strong enough to face eye surgery to prevent blindness. It was New Year's Eve 2006, 94 long days since their birth and dawn was breaking.

After the longest 122 days Edwin and Stephanie Rodriguez will ever know, their children finally left for home on Jan. 29, 2007, each weighing five pounds. They came not without difficult challenges and low expectations from many on the medical team that saved them but they were fighters and so they have, like their father, fought on.

Life since has not been without setbacks. Each was hospitalized again and Serena underwent vocal cord surgery because they had been accidently paralyzed during her heart surgery, making it difficult for her to speak. She also suffers with mild cerebral palsy but at 6 has caught up with her age group in schoolwork.

Her brother faced more even difficult struggles, including battles with cerebral palsy and autism. Each continued to need oxygen to aid breathing 24 hours a day for several years before being weaned from it, but three years after winning their great fight they did what no doctor thought they would: They walked down the aisle at their parents' wedding. It was a championship moment, no belt needed.

"Life goes on," Rodriguez said. "I'm not going to lie and say it's easy every day but my son and daughter are happy kids. Even though there are a lot of things he can't do like feed himself with a fork or hold a piece of birthday cake he's always smiling. My daughter's reading books. She looks out for her brother.

"When you go through something like this you look at life differently. You appreciate little things other people don't. My son was supposed to never walk but now he walks everywhere. He was supposed to be non-verbal but he's starting to talk and he has a better understanding of things. My kids are playing the cards they were dealt. We all are. That's how life is."

As they fought on so did their Dad, entering the byzantine and often baffling world of prize fighting in January 2008 without an Olympic medal to ease the way. Managed by local attorney Larry Army but without a promoter, Rodriquez began his own difficult fight against the forces of boxing that all but the most chosen must overcome. It was a fight of a different sort but one his children and his own difficult childhood had well prepared him for.

Rodriguez was born into poverty in the Dominican Republic, the fourth of six children, just another boy who dreamed of playing shortstop in the major leagues. He barely knew his father, who left for America when he was a child in search of a better life for all of them.

"I was born in the countryside," Rodriguez said. "I didn't really know my Dad (Octavio) until we came to the U.S. (when Rodriguez was 13).

"In the D.R. we had no electricity, no running water. We had an artesian well. We made a hole in the ground and put rocks in it. I used to sleep at my grandmother's when I was 7, 8. She lived next to the river. One time the river overflowed into the house. I remember waking up and my uncle putting me on his back to get away from the river. You could say I came from nothing."

I knew things were not good, but I really believed if I stayed positive, it would be all right. I felt I had to stay strong for Stephanie. I knew things were not good for her ... for any of us. There were times by myself when I broke down and cried. A couple of times I was flat at the bottom."
— Edwin Rodriguez

Image: Emily Harney

When his father finally raised enough money, Edwin and his siblings were suddenly uprooted and dropped into the United States not of his dreams, but to a place where the winters were long and cold and where his father worked ceaselessly at a small bodega in Worcester. If a successful life is about adjustments, Rodriguez got an early education in it.

"It was kind of weird at first to be living with my Dad," he recalled. "As a kid in the D.R. you had a little more freedom. No worries about gangs and stuff. We had family there. I left that all behind and came to a new world.

"The American Dream in the D.R. is making it in baseball. I tried to keep that dream alive. I was a decent shortstop. I made varsity but I lost interest because we couldn't play year-round. A year later I found boxing and I loved it."

His father didn't until Edwin's first trainer intervened, convincing him his son could be more than just another kid in the gym. Within four years, Rodriguez had mastered two things: boxing and English, the latter something he spoke not a word of when he arrived.

"I was young and really open minded," Rodriguez said. "I was happy to be in the U.S. It was a whole different world but I was able to pick up English quite fast.

"Luckily there was a bilingual program my first year in school and then I went into regular classes. I was working in my Dad's store and listening to everybody. I wasn't always understanding but I heard it. It was interesting and I worked hard at it. I think it's important to maintain your language but if you're in the U.S. you need to know proper English.

"My Spanish and English are about even. I speak English more now so it takes me time to get into the rhythm of Spanish."

Rodriguez's boxing skills developed as quickly as his language skills, mastering both while still a teenager. By 19 he was one of the top-rated amateurs in the U.S. and by 21 a young man in love with a new dream and his future wife even though there could have been no more mismatched pair than a college honor student whose parents were Holy Cross professors and lab supervisors and a Dominican-born boxer hoping to make his way in the world as a prize fighter.

Love is blind, of course, which was a blessing for both them and their children. It cares not about backgrounds or the difficult circumstances you were born into. Love is love and often it is enough.

"We were definitely from two worlds," Rodriguez said. "Stephanie was in college. I was in the ring. But she was supportive of me and boxing. She understood I was good at it and she knew how bad I wanted this.

"I love proving myself 1-on-1. Once you get in there you're on your own. You got nobody to blame but yourself. It's a great feeling of accomplishment to go in there and perform.

"People don't understand, I don't think, the 100 percent focus you need to be successful in boxing. Your job is to harm another guy and then switch it off and come home and be a father, a husband. That's not easy.

"I go train in Houston (with veteran trainer Ronnie Shields, who has worked with him his past four fights). I went overseas to work as a sparring partner for guys like Carl Froch, leaving my family with two kids with disabilities. It's a selfish business in that aspect but you have to be. No one else is going to step in there but you."

Army had agreed to manage him but like a lot of guys who come into boxing from the real world, he had no idea what he was getting into. Truth be told, neither did Rodriguez, at least not when it came to the fight outside the ropes.

"I didn't know how the game worked, thank God," said Army, who had represented some professional basketball players but no boxers. "I can't believe the things I've seen and the things people say. Sometimes I feel like I have to take a shower every time I have a business meeting, but that naiveté of believing in a guy takes you along.

"I equated signing him to signing a lottery pick. I didn't realize how difficult the boxing business is. We didn't have a promoter our first nine fights. Half the guys I spoke with sounded like criminals. Nobody does anything for you. We were having pre-fight meals at Burger King like a bunch of kids."

Rodriguez made the road a bit easier by knocking out 13 of his first 17 opponents and signing

Image: Emily Harney

Rodriguez, wife Stephanie and twins Serena and Edwin Jr. make a pretty picture.

with promoter Lou DiBella. He was rising slowly, like well-baked bread, winning 22 straight fights, 15 by knockout. He's been on ESPN's *Friday Night Fights*, *ShoBox: The Next Generation* and twice on HBO, his biggest win – after stopping Buddy McGirt Jr. and easily outpointing Aaron Pryor Jr. to separate himself from the crowd of prospects – coming last March when he outpointed Donovan George (23-3-1, 20 KOs) at Madison Square Garden in his HBO debut.

Such are the oddities of boxing, however, that two fights after Rodriguez easily outboxed George it was George who found himself in an IBF title eliminator against Adonis Stevenson, who stopped him in the 12th round while Rodriguez was defending the USBA middleweight title at a Connecticut casino against undefeated Jason Escalera (13-0-1 at the time).

Despite being ranked No. 2 by the WBC, No. 3 by the IBF and No. 5 by the WBA, his short-term future remains in limbo, a contender waiting for his chance to contend. DiBella, frustrated by the difficulty of getting Rodriguez a shot at names like Froch or Lucian Bute, is considering taking him into a four-man tournament backed by the Prince of Monaco to further build his brand while waiting for what they all believe, despite odds as long as those overcome by his children, will be his opportunity.

"Edwin is someone the networks should be all over," DiBella said. "He's an aggressive fighter who is perfect for TV. He's a good looking kid with a great story. Unfortunately, we're in an age where we don't go up close and personal with fighters. The networks spend more time with assholes who want to comb their hair in the ring [read: Adrien Broner].

"The uneven playing field that exists in televised boxing today is a lot of the reason he isn't a network darling. He's a TV-friendly offensive machine. He's building a following. I just wish network executives understood his 'everyman' appeal.

"I think he'd beat Froch, Bute, Jean Pascal or (Mikkel) Kessler, which is why we can't make a deal with any of them. I always liked him as an amateur. I thought he was a great prospect. I liked his character. That kid is battle tested.

"Now Ronnie, who I think is one of the best trainers in the world, is making him a complete fighter. Donovan George is a guy who'd taken everyone to the brink and Edwin boxed his ears off. He's ready to beat the top guys."

Rodriguez has no doubt about that, for early in his development he tested himself as a sparring partner for Froch, Pascal and contender Daniel Geale, traveling to Australia, Miami and England. He learned firsthand what he needed to know.

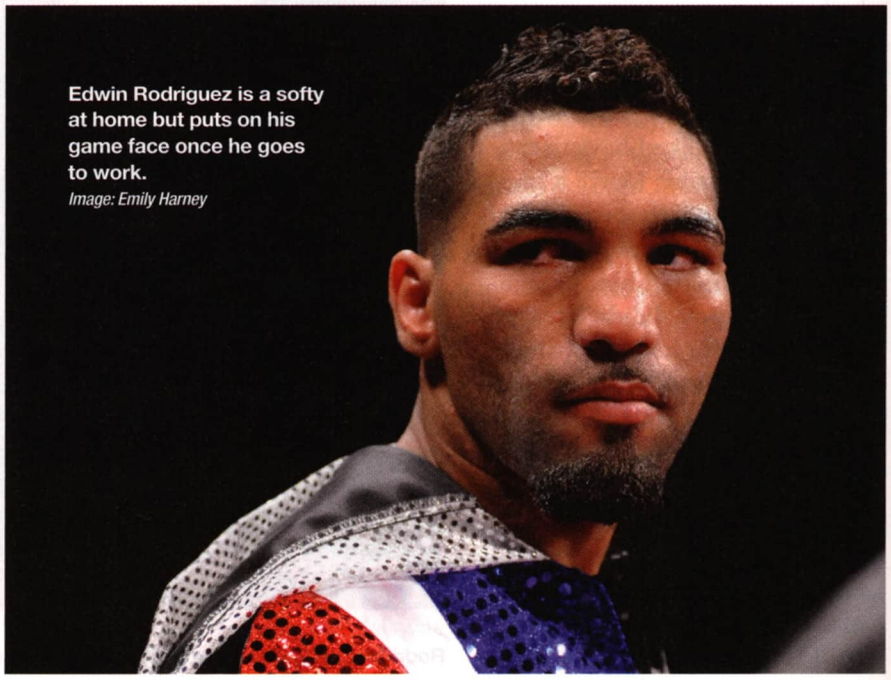
"I was sparring at the highest level," Rodriguez said. "I learned how you run a training camp and that I belonged at that level. It's a good way to find out if you fit in because this is no sport to be No. 2 or No. 3. If I didn't belong it would have been discouraging, but it gave me confidence in my skills."

Unfortunately, it may also have given advance warning to guys like Froch, who after defeating former middleweight champion Arthur Abraham in Showtime's Super Six World Boxing Classic, said of Rodriguez, "Sparring with Edwin was brilliant. He got me ready for this. He's very fast, can punch with both hands and stays in there at times like Abraham will, but I feel he has far more natural ability and speed than Abraham."

Maybe, to a degree at least, that is now his curse?

"There's no downside for a young fighter to get work like that," DiBella said. "It's not a double-edged sword when you're the kid but, yeah, they got to see how scary he is and that has not served him particularly well."

Both the art of boxing and the business of boxing are like chess matches. Often the most important thing is the set up, the creation of opportunity through deception and planning. Rodriguez is at that stage in the ring, where Shields continues to work on



Edwin Rodriguez is a softy at home but puts on his game face once he goes to work.
Image: Emily Harney

Image: Emily Harney

Rodriguez truly learned to appreciate his accomplishments after watching his children fighting to overcome their challenges.

his defense and keep his penchant for aggression under control, while DiBella and Army labor to find him the fight that can change his life.

Rodriguez has been prepared for that by the choices he's made, in this case the choice of a board game over video games.

"I started playing chess when I came to the U.S.," he said. "I thought it was very interesting. My Dad and I played every night. The next year I won the championship of my school and started paying other middle schools. I still didn't know English that much. I was playing one kid and he kept asking if I wanted a draw. I just kept staring at him. I didn't know English but I wasn't stupid. I beat him.

"My style in chess is just like in boxing. I'm aggressive, always trying to set up the knockout. Thinking of chess like a battle helps my boxing. You have to stay ahead of your opponent.

"I play online now and I do OK but I have a little issue. I start training for a fight and forget to (finish chess matches). When I get back to it, I've lost 16 matches or something and have to start over. That's discouraging."

At times so is the business of boxing ... but never the sport. For that he has only love and the same blind faith that kept him fighting for his kids.

"It's not fun, the business side," Rodriguez said. "I enjoy training, figuring out an opponent, but feeling that everything depends on one fight, every day being on the edge of being fired – it's a lot of pressure.

"I love boxing but it's a tough sport to make a living at. It's not like baseball or basketball or football. There's no set salary. You're a professional athlete but you don't get paid like a professional for a long time. Only Top 10 guys get paid, really. Until then you're not really a professional because you're not paid like one. I'm doing well now but it's not an easy road. I wouldn't want my kids to have to deal with it."

His kids, he knows, have actually had to deal with much more. They are the Fighting Rodriguez kids, two little champions in a house that hopes one day soon to add a third.

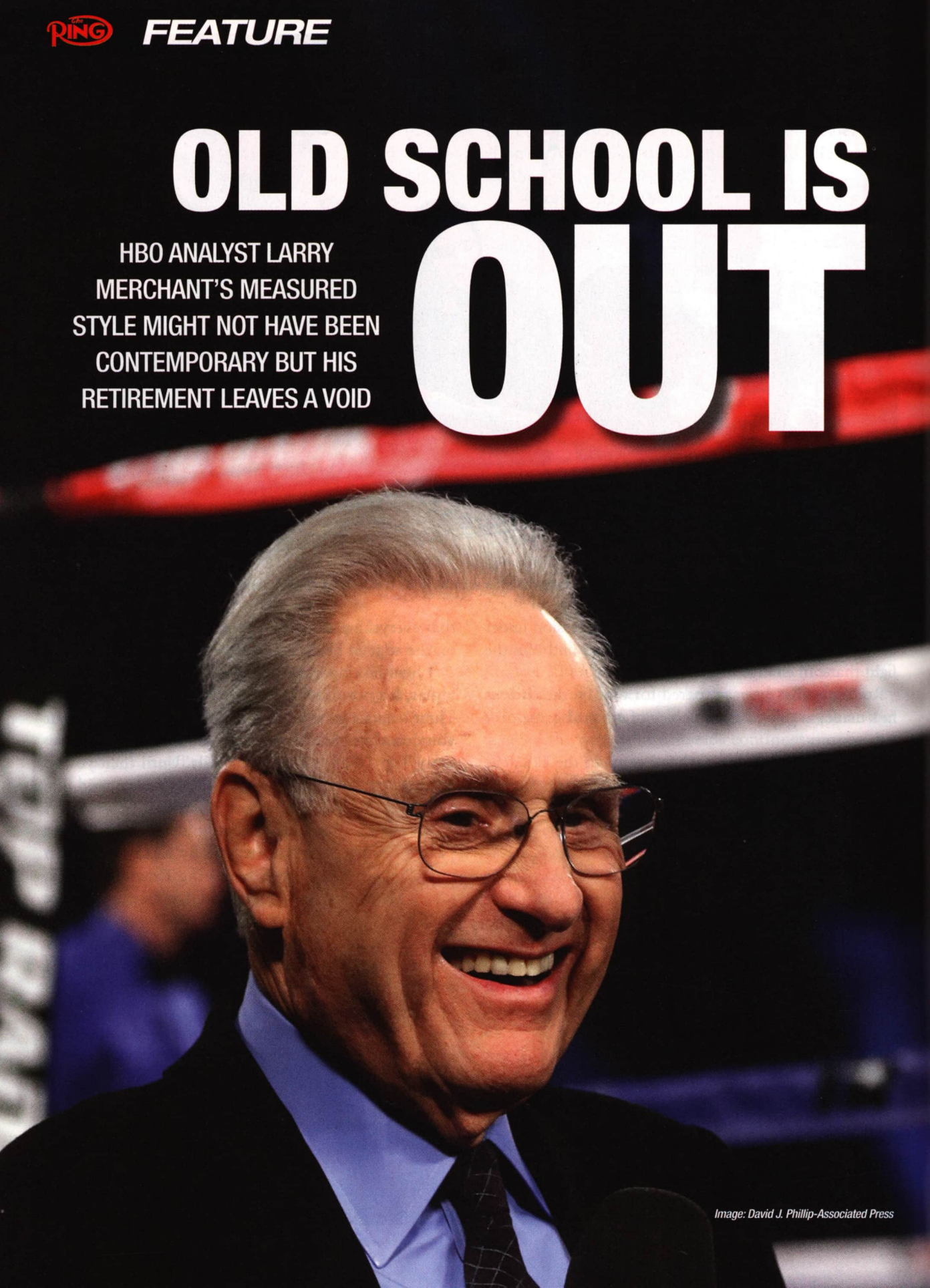
"My American Dream is to do it in boxing for my family," Rodriguez said. "I want to be tested. I want to be challenged. I want to prove I belong. All I want is a fighting chance.

"I'm not going to lie: It's big-time hard sometimes but you have to keep moving forward. I use what they're going through as motivation. Seeing my kids struggle day after day, making a little progress, helps me appreciate the little accomplishments.

"My job is to give them the best life possible. I can only do that in boxing. Feeling sorry for myself is not going to help anybody. This is the hand we've been dealt, and I'm going to play it the best I can." ■

OLD SCHOOL IS OUT

HBO ANALYST LARRY MERCHANT'S MEASURED STYLE MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN CONTEMPORARY BUT HIS RETIREMENT LEAVES A VOID



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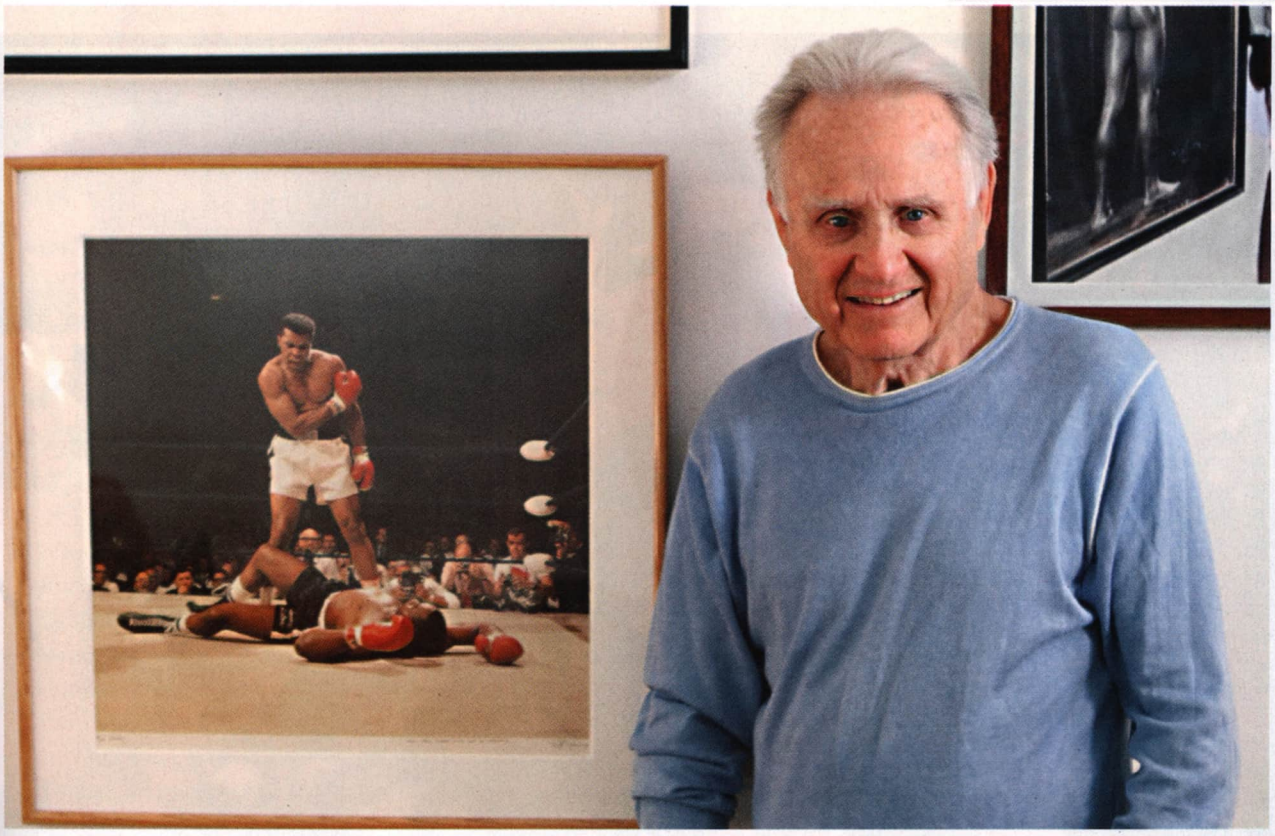


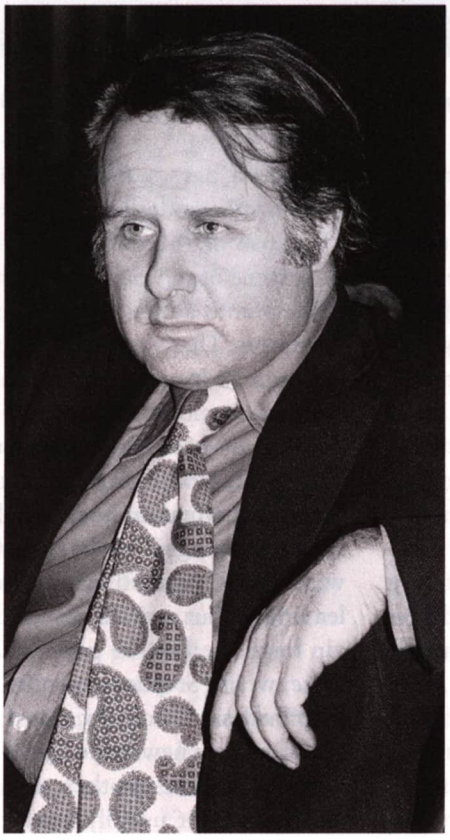
Images: Doug Mazell and Associated Press

Above, Larry Merchant attended some of the biggest fights in history, including the second Muhammad Ali-Sonny Liston clash. Below, Merchant is pictured during his newspaper days.

By: **Bernard Fernandez**

It was The Pause, that periodic hesitation before he delivered what he considered the perfect word, that separated Larry Merchant from the shouters and arm-wavers that comprise the majority of today's sports commentators.

Not all viewers liked or appreciated The Pause; there are those, mostly the younger crowd accustomed to talking heads who end every sentence with exclamation points, high decibel levels and finger pokes toward the camera, that dismiss The Pause as an anachronistic device that should have gone out with Walter Cronkite. Who needs slowly spoken, poetic imagery when two guys are bashing one another in the ring? Merchant's measured approach is so 1950s, so old-fashioned, so newspapery. Everyone knows that the printed word, meaning ink on newsprint, not something hurriedly tossed together by bloggers to be retrieved almost instantly on electronic



"I've always felt like a print guy. Because of the nature of television, some of the glare of big events deflects unto announcers and commentators. That's inevitable, whether you seek it or not. Some people may seek it more than others."

— Larry Merchant

Image: Eric Jamison-Associated Press

Merchant was at home interviewing fighters after the battle. Here, he has a chat with Manny Pacquiao after his victory over Marco Antonio Barrera in 2007.

devices by others, is decidedly unhip these days.

Merchant, whose 35-year run as a boxing analyst for HBO ended with the Nonito Donaire-Jorge Arce fight on Dec. 15, pleads guilty as charged to violations of breathless 21st-century expectations. He is from another era, when many media members attended sporting events wearing fedoras and pecked away on manual typewriters. It is what made him different, and, to many who can still understand the difference between artistry and anarchy, almost beloved.

"I've always felt like a print guy," Merchant, 81, said when asked why he had never allowed himself to morph into the sort of frantic on-screen personality that plays better with modern TV audiences. "Because of the nature of television, some of the glare of big events deflects unto announcers and commentators. That's inevitable, whether you seek it or not. Some people may seek it more than others."

Not that Merchant, gentleman that he is, would dare to identify the sort of attention-hogs who have steadily infringed on the broadcast world as he entered it and is now leaving it. But a good place to begin might be ESPN's popular *First Take*, where Stephen A. Smith and Skip Bayless – ironically, also a couple of former newspaper guys – sit across from one another at a desk and state their usually conflicting cases with the sort of shrillness and gesticulating more often found in Italian operas.

Merchant's now-permanent replacement on HBO boxing telecasts is the much younger Max Kellerman, whose verbal delivery falls somewhere between Smith-Bayless rants and Merchant's signature low-key Pause. It is a shift in corporate philosophy that began to take shape in late 2005, when then-HBO Sports president Ross Greenburg made the decision to dismiss Merchant and replace him with Kellerman, Greenburg's personal choice for the high-visibility gig alongside blow-by-blow announcer Jim Lampley.

But Greenburg's unilateral plan

MERCHANT'S MOST MEMORABLE MOMENTS

Larry Merchant admits to having lots of memorable moments during his 35-year run as an HBO boxing commentator, but he is not David Letterman.

"I'm not good at lists," he said when asked to come up with a personal Top 5 or top 10 for this story. "I'm really not good at lists. I guess I don't have the gene for making lists."

But Merchant does have random thoughts, which he is willing to share, so make of these what you will.

"A couple of things jump into my mind," he said. "One is the first or second fight I did for HBO. It was when James Scott (a light heavyweight contender who had been convicted of armed robbery) fought Eddie Mustafa Muhammad at Rahway Prison, with Don Dunphy, who had been the voice of boxing for so many years, doing the blow-by-blow. I would have to say that was one of my more unusual experiences.

"I guess I'm too oblivious to be intimidated, but having to go through security checkpoints, with metal doors clanging behind you, and interviewing Scott in his cell … that was definitely different. So was doing the telecast, with prisoners as the audience.

"Then, of course, there was that whole Leonard-Hearns-Hagler-Duran series, which was a highlight of the '80s along with the Tyson-Bowe-Holyfield-Lewis thing in the late '80s and early '90s. There was the Tyson-Douglas fight in Tokyo, which was one of those rare events where everybody remembers exactly where they were when they saw it or heard about it.

"I covered many of Larry Holmes' fights. We did the Bowe-Golota fights and the Bowe-Holyfield trilogy, which I think is underestimated as one of the great three-bout boxing rivalries of modern times. We did several of George Foreman's bouts during his comeback.

"The first Chavez-Taylor fight also was a very memorable event, as was the first Arguello-Pryor fight. And, of course, I'd have to put some of those great fights involving Arturo Gatti in there."

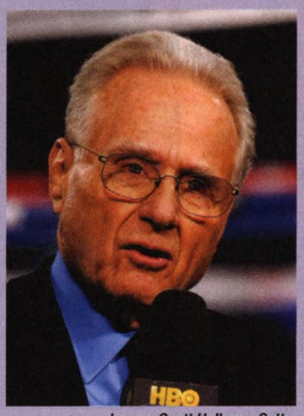


Image: Scott Halleran-Getty

Merchant also understands that, to a lot of people, his very public in-ring spat with Floyd Mayweather Jr. probably will make their lists of unforgettable Merchant moments. Following Mayweather's controversial sucker-punch (but legal) knockout of Victor Ortiz on Sept. 17, 2011, "Money" told Merchant, "You don't know s--- about boxing. You ain't s---." To which Merchant replied: "I wish I was 50 years younger. I'd kick your ass."

Upon further reflection, Merchant chuckles and said, "Well, at least I might have tried."

"When you're doing an interview in the ring after a fight, you have to get right to the heart of the story," he continued. "It can seem – and is, in fact, at times – brusque and maybe even confrontational. When the Mayweather thing happened, I thought I was just doing my job. But with the immediacy of live television you can get spontaneous combustion."

— Bernard Fernandez

blew up when old-school viewers, who were comfortable with The Pause and pretty word pictures Merchant painted in lieu of the stream-of-consciousness manner adopted by so many others, complained. A sizable chunk of HBO's fight audience then made it known that they were not yet ready to have Merchant put out to pasture.

Even Arturo Gatti, whose action-drenched bouts had become a fixture on HBO boxing telecasts, weighed in firmly on the side of Merchant when word of his possible ousting leaked.

"I wouldn't want to speak to nobody but Larry Merchant after a fight," Gatti proclaimed. "Some people don't like him. I like him because he's real. He's got balls to say stuff. If Max Kellerman is going to HBO, HBO is gonna go to s---."

So a compromise was hastily struck. Merchant, whose contract was to expire on June 1, 2007, signed a new agreement that ran through May 31, 2009, with an option to extend the deal through May 31, 2011. Since then he has been working on a show-by-show basis, alternating on telecasts with Kellerman, as has been the case for these past several years, until what once had seemed inevitable became reality. Merchant, and The Pause along with him, were being retired.

Oh, sure, the tributes from HBO flowed like water over Niagara Falls. Merchant wasn't totally leaving, only mostly; he would retain a presence on the "Heart and Soul of

Boxing," as HBO likes to present itself, in what Merchant, in an HBO-authorized press release, described as a role as a "Tom Brokaw-like senior kibitzer on major news and events in boxing."

That same release quoted Greenburg's successor, former Showtime executive Ken Hershman, as saying, "It is extraordinary to reflect on all that Larry Merchant accomplished at HBO Sports during the past 35 years. We've been honored to have him as a colleague and he'll always be a member of the HBO family."

The wording of that press release makes it sound like Merchant, of his own volition, made the decision to step aside, with the grudging consent of his HBO bosses. But an unimpeachable source close to the negotiations stated emphatically that, unlike the machinations previously attempted by Greenburg, Merchant was, in effect, fired. In any case, the tenuous arrangement that had been in effect no longer was acceptable at the upper levels of HBO Sports.

Ask Merchant if he indeed had been handed his walking papers and he responds with the sort of nifty moves he exhibited as a star halfback at Brooklyn's Lafayette High School and, for a time, as a walk-on in legendary coach Bud Wilkinson's Oklahoma University program. Things changed for him because, well, things always change, for everyone. Tradition can be a wonderful thing, but nothing is forever.

"I became sports editor of the *Philadelphia Daily News* when I was 26," Merchant recalled. "I had my own ideas, and I was determined to implement them. Some guys quit. I hired other guys. So there was change, and change can be scary. But change is always inevitable, and it can be good. It makes your blood flow; it revitalizes you in ways. It stirs you up.

"I agreed to a modification of my role when there was a dustup a couple of years ago. There is a corporate structure, and they have to look to the future. Hey, I'm getting old. I understand that. That doesn't mean from a personal viewpoint that I think of myself as too old to continue to do the job, but I do get it."

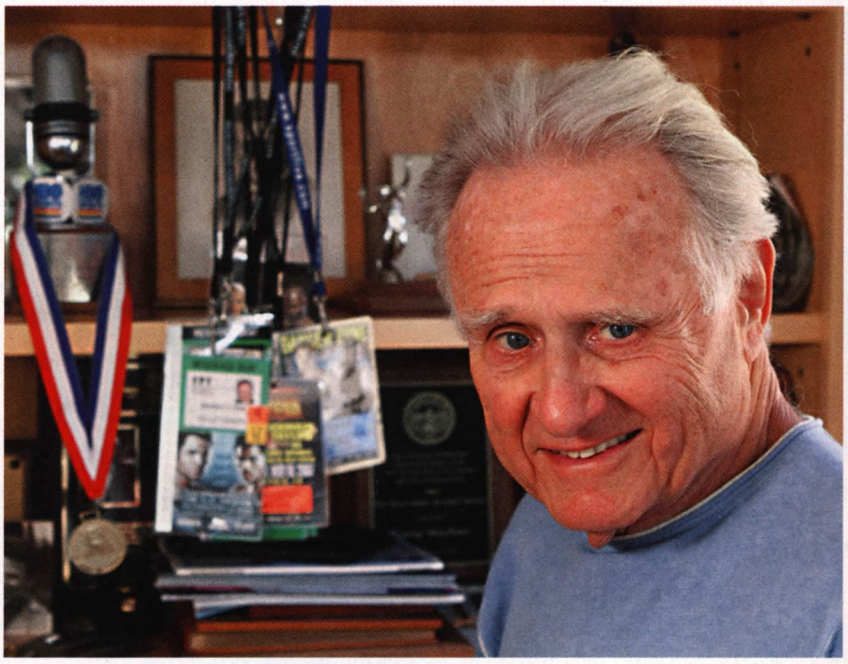


Image: Doug Mazell

Merchant believes that change can revitalize a person.

How Merchant arrived to this stage of an incredibly interesting life makes for a tale of self-discovery that might have been the basis for a work of fiction by Dickens or Melville. Before he became a young man in an old man's body, he started off as an old, wise man in a young man's body. Funny how that works sometimes.

Let the story commence at Lafayette High, where Merchant's sense of history, which became a cornerstone of his personal philosophy of life, soon became evident. He had broken free on a 62-yard run toward the infield portion of Ebbets Field when he stopped in the end zone to reflect on what was, to him, a very special moment.

"I've just scored a touchdown," he said to himself, "and I'm standing where Jackie Robinson plays."

That isn't to say that Merchant arrived in Norman, Okla., before his 17th birthday as one of Wilkinson's blue-chip recruits. Until he tried out and earned a practice jersey with the mighty Sooners, he was as unknown to Wilkinson as the entire state of Oklahoma had been to the kid from Brooklyn with an insatiable curiosity and sense of wanderlust.

"OU sports had a little traction back then, before national television," Merchant said. "Oklahoma had come east to play Army, which was a powerhouse then, and almost beat them. An Oklahoma basketball team reached the NCAA Final against a Holy Cross team with Bob Cousy.

"I had read *The Grapes of Wrath*, which was about people from Oklahoma. The play *Oklahoma!* was a smash on Broadway. Plus, I wanted to get far away from home. There was no one in my family who had gone away to college. Going all the way to Oklahoma just seemed like an adventure."

A self-described "last-string halfback" who was more Rudy than potential standout, the 5-7, 155-pound Merchant nonetheless made an impression during drills with his tenacity. But his dream of someday actually making it into a real game died before his junior season when he suffered a shoulder injury that never healed properly.

"I had some really good experiences," Merchant said of his in-the-shadows college football career. "I warmed the bench for a Sugar Bowl. And I loved to go to practice. I understood that the guys ahead of me on the depth chart were better than I was."

Merchant, as it turned out, later went to another Sugar Bowl as the sports editor of the college newspaper. Writing about sports, he decided, was another way to go on the sort of adventures he had experienced when he took the bold step of applying for admission to OU.

He was the wunderkind sports editor/columnist in Philadelphia before moving on to the *New York Post*, where his opinion pieces also achieved must-read status. And then television came calling; he served as a reporter-commentator-producer for NBC Sports and the host of an award-winning panel show on USA Network until he signed on with HBO, a start-up premium-cable operation that soon was to make its mark in the expanding media universe. Although he is primarily associated with HBO's boxing coverage, he also was part of the original team of correspondents for HBO's *Real Sports* and as a commentator for the network's telecasts of Wimbledon tennis.

"My philosophy of commentary is to convey who the fighters are and what the event is about," Merchant once told columnist Stan Isaacs. "It's not my job to be a cheerleader. I'm skeptical of hype and false narratives. I don't avoid talking about corruption in boxing. I look at the sports world as perfect with its imperfections. My goal is to get viewers involved and be honest at the same time."

Merchant's brand of honesty didn't always endear him to the subjects of his sometimes biting critiques. Most famously, HBO's most dependable ratings-grabber, Mike Tyson, tried to have Merchant removed as an analyst for his fights when Iron Mike wielded a power few fighters have ever have had.

"Tyson was one of those rare prizefighters who transcended the sport," Merchant said. "Before there were such things as reality shows, he was a reality show with so many of the incidents of his life on the front page instead of the back page (of the tabloids). He created a national and international firestorm of curiosity and interest."

So, when Tyson and his entourage tried to bully then-Time Warner Sports president Seth Abraham into removing Merchant, the smart money would have been on HBO to acquiesce. Instead, Abraham held firm. A miffed Tyson took his snarl to Showtime.

Somewhat ironically, "I was the guy who first brought Tyson to the attention of HBO," Merchant noted. "I had gotten some tapes from Jimmy Jacobs (Tyson's co-manager). I took the tapes to Seth and said, 'Here's a guy who looks like he might be a serious fighter. Why don't we follow him and see how he progresses.'

"And when things were going good for Tyson, it was good. But when things started going south, it was Tyson and his pals – not (promoter Don) King – who wanted me off Tyson's fights. Thankfully, HBO told Tyson, 'We're giving you a tremendous amount of money. You can't tell us how to conduct our business.' It was an amazing development because Tyson was the franchise and you don't risk losing the franchise because you place a higher value on not losing the integrity of the broadcast."

At the time, Abraham described Merchant as "one of the pillars" and "the conscience" of HBO boxing.

"He was an ombudsman, a voice for the fan, and a reliable, knowledgeable sounding board for everything we did," Abraham said.

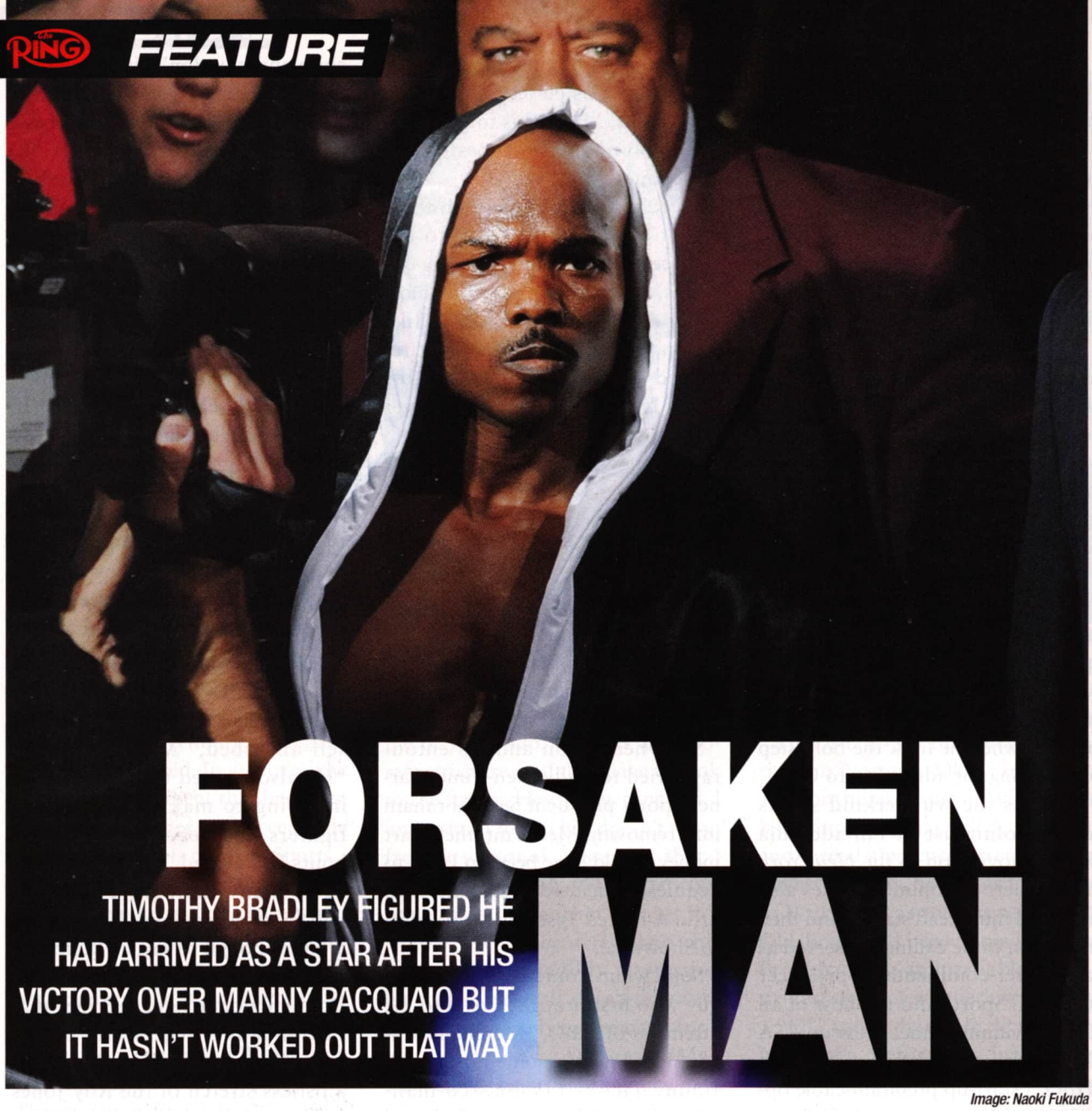
But, as Merchant has duly noted, things change. The guy in the big office who gets to make the decisions can be replaced. Audiences' preferences occasionally shift. On BleacherReport.com, columnist Brian Mazique, no fan of Merchant's, almost gloated over reports of Merchant's impending departure from HBO boxing telecasts.

"Merchant's philosophical rants were at times aloof, misplaced and self-absorbed," Mazique wrote. "He also seemed to take pleasure in trying to make a fool of the fighters he interviewed after the bouts he covered."

For many, though, The Pause will be sorely missed. Who else is erudite enough to say, as Merchant did before the Sugar Ray Leonard-Donny Lalonde fight in 1988, that "Lalonde is a vegetarian, but he fights like a carnivore." Or, during a listless stretch of the Roy Jones Jr.-Bernard Hopkins fight in 1993, "So far, this is a little like watching congressmen argue on C-Span."

"I try to think on my feet," Merchant said of his inimitable style. "Sometimes those pauses are like I'm writing something in my head. It's especially appropriate, I think, in doing boxing. Boxing is a prism through which you can observe human behavior.

"At boxing matches, you have a great opportunity to observe the best and the worst in all of us ... to check out the passing parade." ■



FORSAKEN MAN

TIMOTHY BRADLEY FIGURED HE HAD ARRIVED AS A STAR AFTER HIS VICTORY OVER MANNY PACQUAIO BUT IT HASN'T WORKED OUT THAT WAY

Image: Naoki Fukuda

By: **Tim Smith**

It is one of the cruelest twists in boxing. A boxer knocks off a popular, highly ranked, extremely marketable champion and expects to immediately step into his shoes. He waits and waits for the windfall, but it never comes. In boxing the victor doesn't always reap the spoils.

Just because you beat the man doesn't make you the man. This is a hard lesson that Timothy Bradley has learned. After beating Manny Pacquiao in a controversial 12-round decision to win the WBO welterweight title in Las Vegas on June 9, 2012, Bradley thought the door was opened for him to become the sport's next superstar. At the very least he expected he would get another multi-million dollar payday in the rematch against Pacquiao.

Bradley, a two-division champion with an unblemished 29-0 record, did indeed open a door. But there were no big pay-per-view dates or piles of cash behind it. There was just a barrage of venomous criticism from fans and boxing pundits who believe that Pacquiao was on the wrong side of a bad decision.

Bob Arum of Top Rank, Bradley and Pacquiao's promoter, called for an investigation into the scoring by the Nevada State Athletic Commission. WBO President Francisco "Paco" Valcarcel ordered a five-judge panel to review the fight. All five judges scored it for Pacquiao, but the WBO did not vacate the title. They ordered a rematch, which Pacquiao turned down.

The fact Bradley received an unpopular victory over Pacquiao wasn't his fault. He simply did his job as best he could.
Image: Naoki Fukuda

"He won in controversial fashion and usually when that happens the fans blame the guy who won, not the guy who lost," said Carl Moretti, Chief of Boxing Operations for Top Rank. "It's not Bradley's fault. The judges had him winning the fight. He had nothing to do with the scoring. But the fans are blaming him."

Shane Mosley can tell Bradley what it's like to beat the man but not become the man. Mosley defeated Oscar De La Hoya twice – once as a welterweight and once at junior middleweight – but he never usurped De La Hoya as the pay-per-view king and boxing's top attraction.

"There is one big difference between Shane and Tim Bradley," Moretti said. "Everyone saw Shane beat Oscar. Hardly anybody thought that Tim beat Manny Pacquiao."

As the criticism beat down on him the normally loquacious and outgoing Bradley became angry and withdrawn. His wife, Monica, took away his cell phone and finally had it disconnected to insulate him from the media.

When reached recently on her cell phone, Monica Bradley said she would have her husband telephone a reporter after he finished his morning workout near their home in Indio, Calif. Bradley never phoned back. And Monica Bradley stopped answering her cell phone on subsequent attempts to reach her.

Arum expects Bradley to return to the ring on March 16 (no opponent or site had been announced). But it has been a long road back to the ring since his match against Pacquiao. If he fights in March, it will have been nine months since he was last in the ring. Long absences have characterized Bradley's career in the last two years. After he defeated Devon Alexander on Jan. 29, 2011, Bradley returned to the ring 10 months later to face Joel Casamayor in Nov. 12, 2011. Then there was a seven-month gap before he stepped in against Pacquiao on June 9, 2012.

It is not the ideal schedule for a 29-year-old boxer who is trying to build himself into a star. Controversy and post-fight injuries aside, Bradley should have climbed back into the ring as soon as possible after the match against Pacquiao.

Bradley, a workmanlike boxer with very little flair for the dramatic, built himself into a contender and a champion as a result of his willingness to travel and take on all comers. He won his first world championship by taking a gamble to go England to fight Junior Witter.

Bradley had spent all the money he earned as a dishwasher and waiter to train for the match against Witter and had $11 in his bank account when he got on the plane to travel to Nottingham, England. He dropped Witter in the sixth round on the way to a close, 12-round split decision to win the WBC junior welterweight title in 2008.

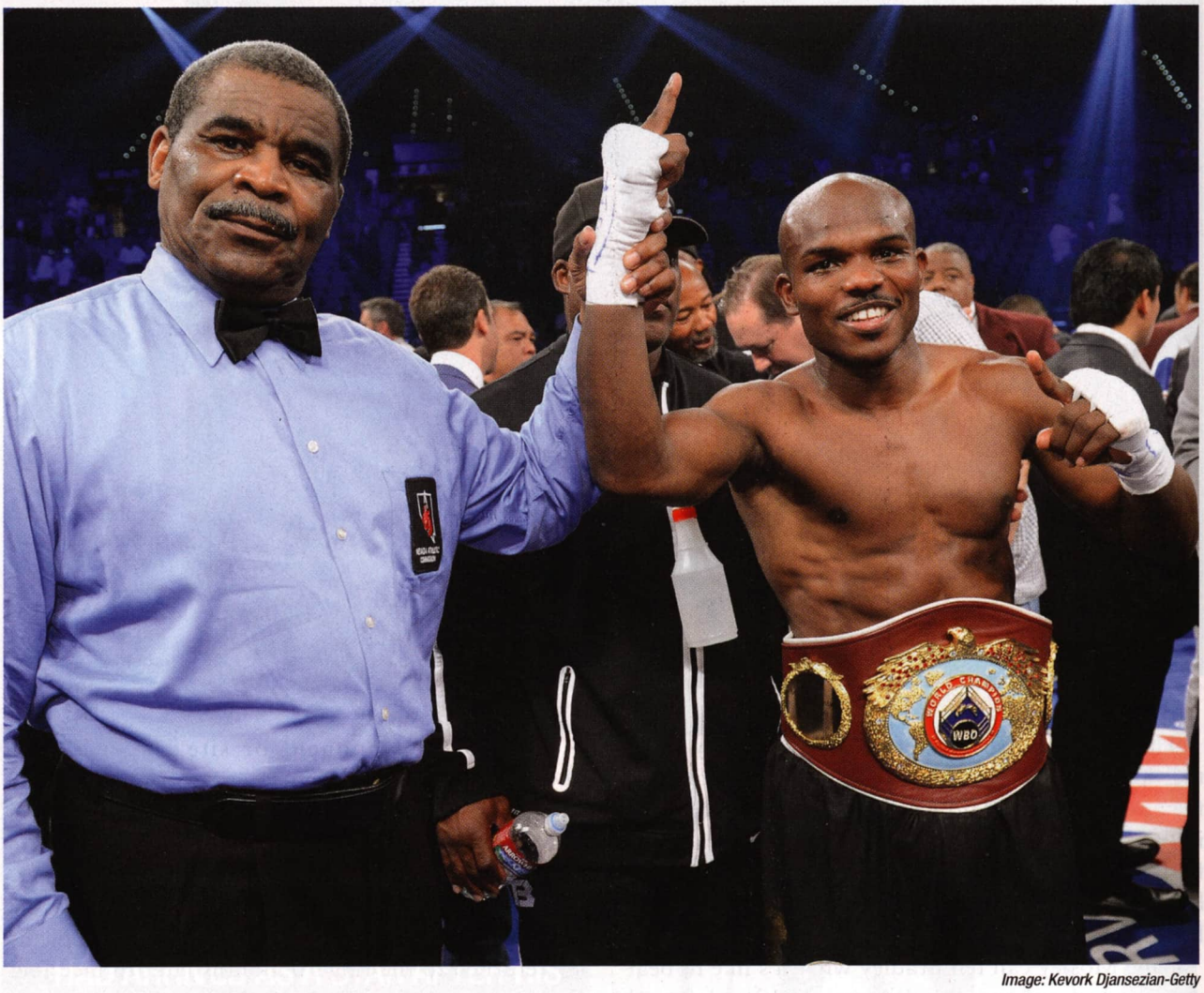


Image: Kevork Djansezian-Getty

Bradley figured his victory over Pacquiao was the start of something good.

It was light years away from where he found himself four years later as he prepared for the biggest match of his life, against Pacquiao – a major pay-per-view bout for which Bradley was guaranteed $5 million. He fought valiantly and appeared to blunt Pacquiao's onslaught, which is seemingly how he scored points with the judges. In their eyes, Bradley won by not getting overwhelmed. Bradley wasn't at his best during the fight, though, injuring both feet so badly that he needed a wheelchair to make it to the post-fight press conference. The negative reaction was immediate.

If there were doubts, Bradley wanted the chance to clear them up in a rematch. Cameron Dunkin, Bradley's manager, said he immediately sought a second fight with Pacquiao, but the Filipino superstar wanted nothing to do with it. Pacquiao believed he won the fight, and he didn't have anything to prove by fighting him again. Pacquiao also thought he would make more money fighting Juan Manuel Marquez for a fourth time than he would in a Bradley rematch. It was a fateful decision because Marquez knocked out Pacquiao in the sixth round of their match on Dec. 8.

"The (Pacquiao-Bradley) pay-per-view didn't do any numbers (a reported 950,000) and we felt that the rematch would do fewer numbers," Arum said. "By contract Pacquiao could have asked for a rematch, but it wasn't economically feasible to do it. We're talking now about not a few hundred thousand dollars either way, but millions of dollars."

Bradley didn't understand why he couldn't cash in on his victory. He earned $5 million against Pacquiao, and he didn't want to go back down the scale. He balked at taking $2.5 million to fight a rematch against Lamont Peterson in December, before refusing the fight altogether. It probably would have been easy

money since Bradley handily defeated Peterson in a lopsided decision in the first match on Dec. 12, 2009.

"There were people whispering in his ear that he shouldn't make anything less than he made against Pacquiao," Dunkin said. "But he made a mistake by listening to those people. And he let the negative comments get to him.

"I kept telling him, 'Listen Tim, you beat Manny Pacquiao no matter what they say. It's in the record book. You're undefeated. You made $5 million, but it doesn't make you a $10 million fighter. All those people who said you're going backward if you take $2.5 million to fight Peterson are idiots.' He didn't want to hear it."

To compound matters, Bradley has been caught in the middle of the promotional Cold War between Top Rank and Golden Boy Promotions. Some of the better matches that could be made for Bradley involve Golden Boy fighters like Devon Alexander, Robert Guerrero, Andre Berto, Paulie Malignaggi and Victor Ortiz. And the one mega-match, the one bigger than Pacquiao – against Floyd Mayweather Jr. – will probably never happen as long as Bradley is with Top Rank.

"Boxing already doesn't have a huge talent pool," Moretti said. "The options for all fighters are less and less these days. In a sense maybe it will become easier for Bradley to make a fight because guys will say I may as well take this shot because there's nothing else coming down the pike for a while. And a lot of times it comes down to not how you win, but how you lose."

Bradley knows that from firsthand experience now. ■

"He won in controversial fashion and usually when that happens the fans blame the guy who won, not the guy who lost. It's not Bradley's fault.

— Carl Moretti, Chief of Boxing Operations for Top Rank

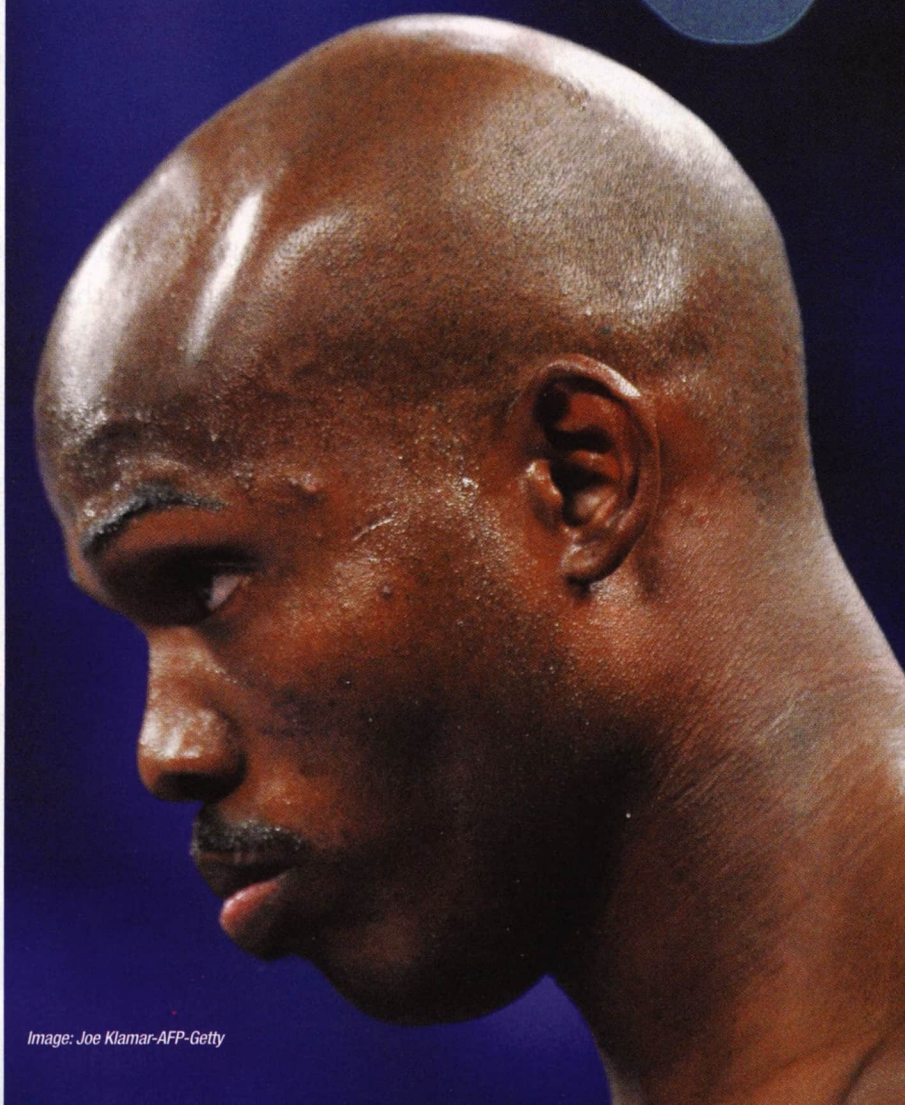


Image: Joe Klamar-AFP-Getty

NEXT GENERATION

THE McGUIGANS ARE BUILDING CARL FRAMPTON INTO WHAT THEY HOPE WILL BE THE NEXT IRISH STAR

By: **Gavin Evans**

Carl Frampton and Barry McGuigan make quite a pair. It's not just that they're both diminutive boxing men from the island of Ireland. There's more to it – a special bond of a kind that is rare between boxer and manager.

Of course, they sing each other's praises. But the symmetry goes deeper. When Frampton is in training, his fiancée and daughter stay in McGuigan's house in Kent, England, and it would seem that the lessons go beyond the business of fighting.

McGuigan, a Catholic from the south, grew up at the height of the Troubles in the North, and he quickly learned how to negotiate this gulf in a way that pleased all but the extremists on both sides, making him a celebrity throughout the island. To reinforce his image as a figure of unity, he refused to fight in the colours of either Britain or Ireland and he married Sandra, a Protestant.

Frampton grew up in the tough, working-class estate of Tiger's Bay in Belfast, Northern Ireland. It was, he says, "100 percent Protestant and Loyalist." Across the street was the New Lodge estate, which was "100 percent Catholic and Republican."

"There was a lot of trouble between the estates," he said. "There was always fighting and sometimes rioting, and I'd see cars getting burnt and stuff like that."

But today, Frampton, like McGuigan, makes it his business to reach across the divide. To illustrate the point, it is worth mentioning that his fiancée, Christine, is Catholic.

Image: Leigh Dawney

Image: Lawrence Lustig

Junior featherweight contender Carl Frampton celebrates after the biggest victory of his career, a sixth-round knockout of former titleholder Steve Molitor on Sept. 22 in Frampton's hometown of Belfast.

And it was boxing that helped to take him beyond the bigotry of the religious divide. He was 7 when he joined a few of his friends on a short walk to the local gym where Midland Amateur Boxing Club was based, and he never looked back.

"Boxing in Northern Ireland has always been mixed," he said. "Catholics and Protestants ... we were all mixed up together, even at the height of the Troubles, so we trained together and boxed together and became friends."

Like fellow Protestant Wayne McCullough, he had no problems in boxing for Ireland (40 times in all, he says), winning the Irish national title at flyweight in 2005 and featherweight in 2009. He also won the silver medal for Ireland at the European Union championships in Dublin in 2007. He is a bit vague on his amateur record but thinks he had about 160 fights, winning more than 130.

McGuigan first spotted Frampton at the European championships and says he was immensely impressed, noting that Frampton's speed, aggression and power made him perfectly suited for the professional game. Two years later he was one of several managers to make an offer, and the then-22-year-old immediately said yes.

"When Barry approached me, I knew it was time," he said. "I'd met him a couple of times before, but I didn't really know him, except as an idol."

Frampton says they immediately bonded and that he has never regretted the move. "Straight away we warmed to each other," he said. "He put me up at his house, and they fed me and did my washing and all, so we got to know each other quickly, and the relationship gets stronger all the time."

To which McGuigan responded: "He's a lovely, friendly, self-confident kid. I really liked him right from the start."

Frampton had a solid, working-class background. His father, Craig, worked at a Belfast City Council recreation center and his mother in a supermarket. He has an older sister and a younger brother. His par-

"I was very shy as a child, the kind of guy who was intimidated easily. But boxing taught me to defend myself so after a while people stopped picking on me, and I didn't get into many street fights."

Image: Scott Heavey-Getty

ents imparted a strong work ethic, and this came out in Frampton's consistent application to his boxing, which gave him a self-confidence that had previously been lacking.

"I was very shy as a child, the kind of guy who was intimidated easily," he says. "But boxing taught me to defend myself so after a while people stopped picking on me, and I didn't get into many street fights."

Spend a few minutes with Frampton and you soon notice how direct and honest he is. And he makes it clear his lifestyle in his late amateur days wasn't ideal. "I'd say I was never really a bad boy, but I did like to drink a bit, especially when I was a teenager."

He acknowledges that while he held the boxing together his life beyond the ropes drifted for a time. He followed his mates in dropping out of school in his final year, and then started a college course in sports studies, which he did not complete.

Instead, he received intensive tuition in the business of becoming a professional boxer. Living and training with the McGuigans before fights prompted the lad to embrace a Spartan existence, which was reinforced when his daughter, Carla, was born two years ago.

"I'm still not a teetotaller nowadays, but I'd say I very rarely drink," he says. "I think in the whole of 2012 I went drinking once. It just doesn't appeal to me anymore. I prefer spending time with my family because I'm away from them so much."

His usual pattern is to have a week's rest after a fight and then return to light training before spending several weeks with the McGuigans, packing in two intensive training sessions while running under the guidance of his manger's son, Shane.

Frampton began his professional

career in 2009 at featherweight, starting out with a second-round stoppage over one Sandor Szinavel, but by his fourth fight he had dropped to junior featherweight, where he has remained.

He insists he can continue making the 122-pound limit for several years to come. "I'm not going to lie; making the weight is never exactly easy, but when I work hard for 10 weeks before a fight, it's not too difficult. I'm actually bigger and stronger than when I was a featherweight, and that's due to the training and nutrition advice from Shane."

Frampton is effusive in his praise for the younger McGuigan. "He's younger than me, but he really knows his stuff. He's was a good amateur himself, and he's worked corners all over the world, and he's studied nutrition, and he keeps on learning. He always spots weaknesses in opponents before I do. You watch: He'll soon be one of the world's top trainers."

Because of Frampton's 15 years of amateur experience, the McGuigans were confident about moving him quickly. He was ready for the Celtic title after seven fights and the Commonwealth title after 10. But his big test came in his 15th bout in September of last year when he faced former two-time titleholder Steve Molitor, who had come back with a win after losing his title in 2011 and had a 34-2 record.

The pattern was set early when Frampton nailed the Canadian with a stiff left hook, and he never let off after that, using his advantages in speed and strength to win every round before dropping and stopping Molitor in the sixth. "Just as I'd expected," Frampton said, "after the fight, people said he was shot, and it's true, he's not the fighter he was, but I hurt him early and never let him off."

Image: Andrew Yates-AFP-Getty

Frampton (right) had too much fire for Raul Hirales last May.

The obvious challenge at this stage of his career would be a domestic showdown with the RING-rated Scott Quigg, whose sixth-round knockout of Rendall Munroe last year was impressive. McGuigan is convinced his man has Quigg's number and, naturally, Frampton agrees.

"I think Scott's a hard trainer and a good fighter," Frampton said, "but with my amateur background, I've been in the game a lot longer than him and I think he's easy to hurt because he doesn't have the best chin, and he's a bit one-paced. He's definitely got his vulnerabilities. But I don't think his promoters, the Hattons, want the fight, even though there's a lot of money in it."

McGuigan said his charge will be ready for a title shot this year even though he is competing in one of the game's most talent-rich divisions, In addition to the quick and elusive Cuban, Rigondeaux, it includes pound-for-pound star Nonito Donaire and unbeaten Mexican Abner Mares. "Of the top three, I'd definitely go for

Image: Scott Heavey-Getty

Frampton and the McGuigans, Shane (left) and Barry (second from right) are a formidable team. Trainer Gerry Storey is at right.

Mares. He has the perfect style for Carl. But [Jhonatan] Romero and [Alejandro] Lopez are fighting for the vacant IBF title, and we'd be keen for Carl to fight the winner of that one."

Frampton, who is promoted on a fight-to-fight basis by Matchroom (Eddie Hearn), acknowledges that he should wait another year or two before tangling with Donaire or Rigondeaux. "If one of those fights came up tomorrow, I'd take it," he said. "I've got a good chin, a big heart and a big punch, so I'd have a decent chance, but I'd be more confident after a few more fights. But with Mares, I'd love to fight him right now. He's the weakest of the top three."

Frampton talks of a 10-year professional career, which would take him into his early 30s before retiring. "I want to go out when the time is right, and not leave it too late, but I suppose that all boxers say this and then they stay around too long."

In this sense, he could learn from McGuigan's example. The "Clones Cyclone" won the WBA title by beating the great Eusebio Pedroza after four years as a professional and lost it to Steve Cruz in a Nevada heat wave in his third defense. He lost his fourth comeback fight on cuts to Britain's Jim McDonnell and promptly retired at the age of 29 to become Britain's best-known boxing broadcaster.

He believes Frampton has a style designed for greater longevity.

"I was a quantity puncher," McGuigan said. "He's a quality puncher. And even though he's got a very exciting style, he's not as recklessly aggressive as I was. He's clever, sharp defensively and can counterpunch and box off the back foot, which makes for a longer lasting career. I think he'll be the next major star of Irish boxing." ■

PLUCK OF THE IRISH

Five fighters from Ireland who made their mark (including years active):

1. RINTY MONAGHAN (1932-49)
Popular fighter from Belfast, world flyweight champ in late '40s, sang to his fans after his fights.

2. BARRY McGUIGAN (1981-89)
Clones featherweight became hero after stunning Eusebio Pedroza to win world featherweight title in 1985.

3. DAVE "BOY" MCAULEY (1983-92)
Flyweight from Larne was overshadowed by McGuigan but held IBF title for three years.

4. STEVE COLLINS (1986-97)
Tough two-division world titleholder from Dublin had two wins over both Nigel Benn and Chris Eubank.

5. WAYNE MCCULLOUGH (1993-2008)
1992 Olympic silver medalist from Belfast held bantamweight title in the mid-'90s.

THE FIGHTS OF SPRING

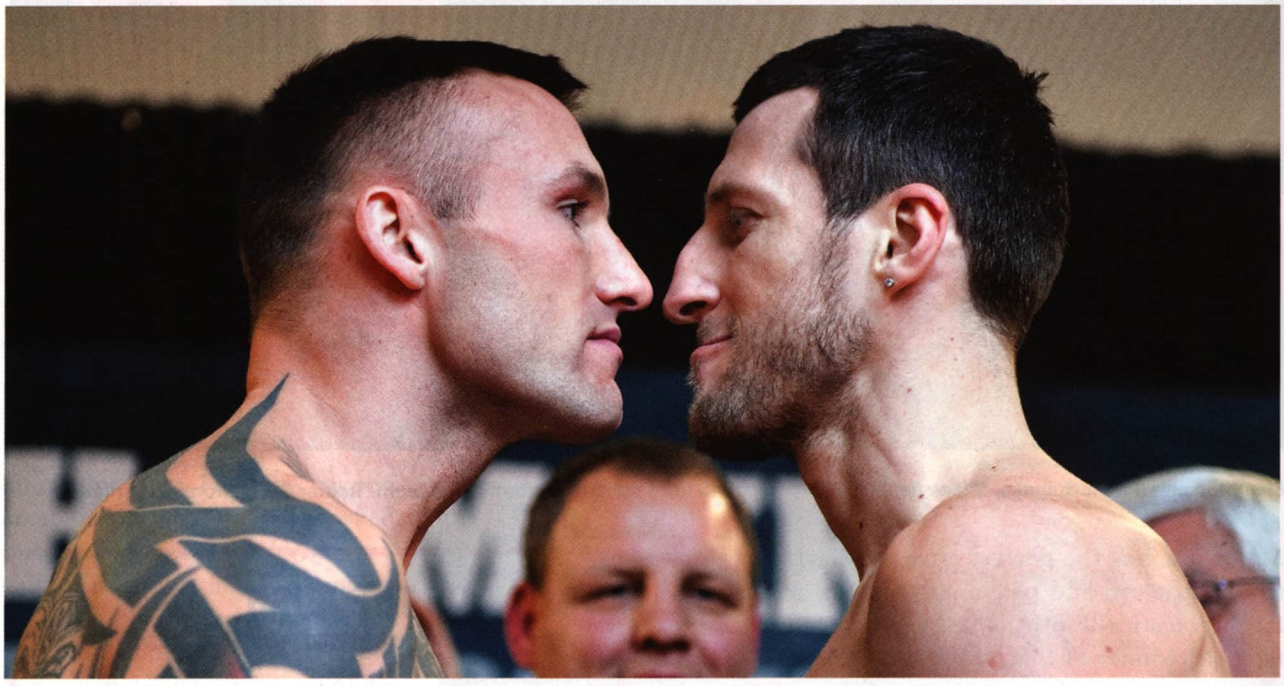


Image: AFP-Getty

Mikkel Kessler (left) and Carl Froch appear to be headed toward another showdown.

By: **Gareth A Davies, *The Telegraph*, London**

The springtime will present riveting rounds between the ropes in Europe.

From the top: The May 2013 meeting of Carl Froch and Mikkel Kessler is taking shape. It's a fan's fight, and the residue from the contest carries a legacy for both the fighters and the promoters.

Young but increasingly influential promoters Eddie Hearn and Kalle Sauerland, who is German but spent his formative years at a renowned private school in north London and is well-versed in the culture of the British sporting landscape, can stamp their mark with this match-up.

It will be at a major venue. Hearn's germane view on Froch's potential gain from the rematch is on point. Froch has more to gain than Kessler. That's probably right. The Dane already has fame, fortune and widespread adulation in his homeland.

Right now Froch is Britain's No. 1 practitioner, pound for pound, without the nation knowing it. Unjust, but true.

Hearn told me: "Carl has to win this fight, otherwise he is just going to be viewed in history as a great fighter. This is the real legacy fight for him."

"If he wins, he can go down as one of the greatest British boxers of all time. But he has to beat people like Kessler to be a true great, in my opinion."

Timing is everything. And Froch was unlucky. He missed out on the highest profile fight possible against Joe Calzaghe, who had become a crossover star. You might also add Bernard Hopkins to that mix.

Rather than being propelled into the spotlight with an identifiable yardstick by which the British public could measure him, Froch has had to fashion his own niche.

Five million people watched him defeat Jean Pascal on network television. But the great run he then had, known to boxing's aficionados, barely touched the casual fight fan. The network television deal had gone, and without widespread exposure, his greatest moments were missed by the masses. Recognition with the public outside boxing has been a long process. This fight could start to tip that balance.

If Froch beats Kessler convincingly, comparisons with Calzaghe can be drawn much more easily.

I'll never forget the night in Cardiff when 50,000 fans took to the streets for Calzaghe-Kessler. The atmosphere was electric, even at 4 a.m. when the lights went out in the stadium as the media, fighters and their entourages finally left the Millennium Stadium.

Hearn bleeds with ambition for Froch against nemesis Kessler, whose points victory over Froch in their first meeting still rankles the Brit.

"I think Carl might stop Mikkel late this time," Hearn wagered to me. "Carl's a different fighter now, he's got fast hands, he pounces more, he starts faster. That's the lesson from the Andre Ward fight. He just never got going."

There are those who might argue with that assessment, viewing Ward as inhabiting a different plane. For me, Ward would probably have beaten Calzaghe by a razor-tight points decision.

Hearn is clearly targeting another assault on Ward if the Kessler rematch plays out to the tune Froch's Nottingham army will want to hear.

"I'm not saying that Carl would beat Ward, but if the Kessler fight sees Carl emerge with a powerful victory, I think we could draw Ward to the U.K., and over here, it could be a different fight," Hearn said

Possibly. But the building blocks around this Froch-Kessler contest could create a fight with Ward capable of generating several million pounds. They would need that for Ward to cross The Pond.

Froch-Kessler is likely to sell out (at time of going to press the options were the two biggest indoor arenas in the U.K., Manchester Arena, capacity 19,000, or the 02 Arena in London, 17,000). Thousands of Danish Vikings, an estimated 5,000 of them, are expected to cross the waters from mainland Europe to cheer on Kessler, who, after all, enjoys the kind of stardom in his homeland that David Beckham enjoys here. Even Kessler's sister is a glamor star in that country.

What will be interesting is how the fight sells on pay-per-view. Hearn is the only British promoter currently holding a deal with Sky Sports in the U.K. – he has 20 fight night dates this year on Sky Sports, which has not had a boxing pay-per-view event since David Haye's flawed challenge against Wladimir Klitschko in July 2011.

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Intriguing developments afoot, too, with the plans Golden Boy Promotions has to take out a promoter's license on these shores.

That plan gathered steam with CEO Richard Schaefer's last visit to London, in January, when GBP announced the signing of British Olympic middleweight bronze medalist Anthony Ogogo.

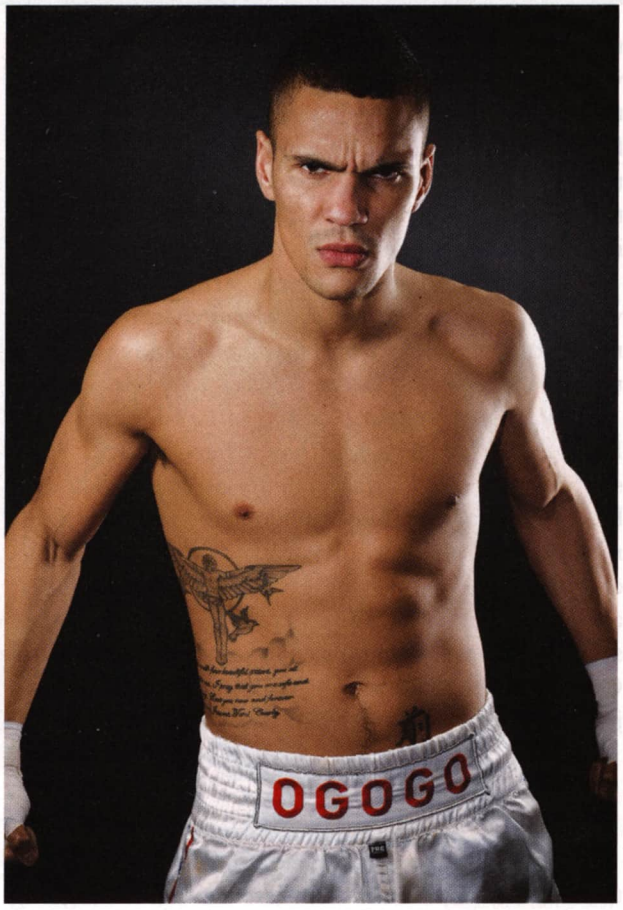

Image: Martin McNeal/Hoganphotos

British Olympian Anthony Ogogo figures prominently in the plans of Golden Boy Promotions in the U.K.

Schaefer sat down with British Boxing Board Secretary Robert Smith and Chairman Charlie Giles on his sojourn here. There is precedent for such a set-up. In the '90s, South African promoter Rodney Berman of Golden Gloves took a British promoter's license under the banner of Golden Fists, with Dave Lewis, a British citizen involved in the boxing industry, as their licensed representative. l

"I can't see there being a problem, but they will need an agent based in the U.K.," Smith explained to me.

"The competition is good for everybody. Golden Boy are one of the biggest promoters around, they are successful, and if they can bring great fights here, all well and good," added Smith.

Schaefer explained: "The plan is to have four shows a year. We will be filing an application for the license. Golden Boy has a great reputation in the U.K. The signs and elements are there for a 'Golden Boy U.K.', assuming we can find the right fighters."

"I came to the Olympics, I followed the U.K.

team, saw the support and the atmosphere and it was amazing. All these factors made me think it's the right time. But we need the right stable with fighters who have the talent but also the charisma to transcend the sport in the U.K. market, and then the world. It's not about quantity, it's about quality."

Ogogo fits the mold. The gregarious male model who had a promising junior soccer career with Premiership outfit Norwich City, has already carved a niche as a celebrity in the U.K.

He was given a heady launch in London's swanky Mayfair in January, and has a personality in the spotlight that will attract media attention. He also has great heart, and desire. He came through a terrible shoulder injury to qualify for the Olympics, cracked a rib in sparring on the eve of the Games, and battled through the emotions of his mother surviving a brain hemorrhage just days before the Olympics began. What we really don't know yet is just how much talent he really has as a prize fighter.

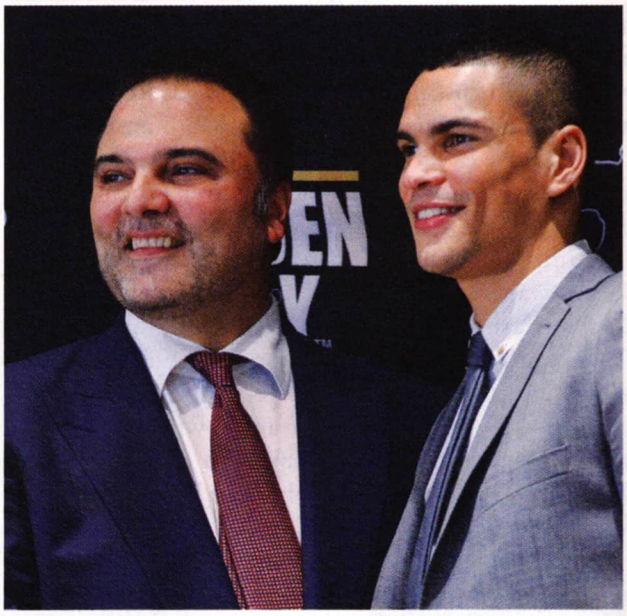

Image: Martin McNeal-Hoganphotos

Golden Boy CEO Richard Schaefer, with Anthony Ogogo, said the time is right to do business in the U.K.

Talking of prize fighters, it's hard to know what to make of Steve Collins' insistence that he is going to make a comeback, 16 years after his retirement, at the age of 48. One man and only one fight occupies his mind: Roy Jones Jr.

Will it happen? It certainly looks that way. Collins is adamant that it will come to fruition. Collins was teak tough, an unstoppable chunk of granite during his career. They say Who Dares Wins, and he lived that credo to the letter.

The first half of his career was fought in the United States, and included two failed stabs at the WBA middleweight title, resulting in losses to Mike McCallum, then Reggie Johnson.

But once he'd come back to Ireland, and lost in a European title challenge against Sumbu Kalambay, he invaded the U.K. scene, won the WBO middleweight title and then the WBO super middleweight title, making seven defenses of the gold before retiring.

Several times I came across him in the '90s after his retirement at the most exclusive polo clubs in England. He'd tried his hand at the sport for princes. Bizarre. But he's always been great value.

Collins became revered after that stellar second-half of his career. Two victories, remember, over both Chris Eubank and Nigel Benn in his last eight fights. Worth recalling that he unsettled the normally imperturbable Eubank by telling him in the buildup to one of those fights that he had been hypnotized and could not be knocked out or hurt. The Irishman later revealed it was a ploy.

Collins reckons he had an epiphany last Christmas. He had been to the States, called out Jones and spoke to the future Hall of Famer's management team. Collins has rebuffed the disbelief of many through insisting that he is financially comfortable, and will have all the stringent medical tests and brain scans before stepping into the ring.

Image: Tim Whitby-Getty

COLLINS

At the time of going to press, Collins had disclosed that he was back in training and was awaiting contracts being signed. The bottom line is whether there is any meaning here, outside burning personal ambition.

Would it not be better to visit a hypnotist for real this time and be coaxed under the spell that contentedness lies with a decorated 11-year career that ended in 1997 with a chalkboard showing 36-3?

Another from that era on this side of the pond, Henry Wharton, has emerged into the light again

Image: John Gichigi-Getty

One of Steve Collins' greatest victories was his sixth-round stoppage of Nigel Benn in 1996. Collins "retired" the following year.

with a more sensible, and philanthropic desire.

Wharton, the slugger with a great left hook who had several memorable fights in his 27-3-1 career, among them a standout contest with Eubank, has opened a gym in York. The upstairs of a closed-down cinema has been converted, and Wharton's intention is to create a walk-in for many young people, intent on transforming lives.

Wharton, the British, Commonwealth and European super-middleweight champion, lost only to Eubank, Nigel Benn and Robin Reid.

Benn, incidentally, dropped into Wharton's newly-opened gym in January, only days before the once "Dark Destroyer" set off for Australia, where he is going to live and work as a preacher.

• • • • • • • • •

Ahead of two significant April world title bouts, with Martin Murray heading to Argentina for a date with Sergio Martinez and Amir Khan making his return to England for the first time in two years, Frank Warren's "Rule Britannia" card has meaningful match-ups from top to bottom on March 16.

The lightweight unification world championship between Ricky Burns and Miguel Vazquez is one to savor, while Nathan Cleverly makes a mandatory defense of his light heavyweight title against Robin Krasniqi.

George Groves contests the European title at 168 pounds (12st), and just to show what a difference a year really does make, Dereck Chisora is set to get his British Boxing Board license back. That brawl in Munich with David Haye really does seem a long time ago now.

We're set fair for a great Spring season.

Gareth A Davies *is Boxing Correspondent for The Telegraph, London.*

U.K. TOP 10

Gareth A Davies' monthly pound-for-pound list for British boxers.

1. Carl Froch
2. Amir Khan
3. David Haye
4. Ricky Burns
5. Kell Brook
6. Nathan Cleverly
7. Tyson Fury
8. David Price
9. Scott Quigg
10. George Groves

Light heavyweight contender Sergei Kovalev (left) overwhelmed Gabriel Campillo from the opening bell.
Image: Emily Harney

SERGEI KOVALEV TKO 3 GABRIEL CAMPILLO

DATE: JAN. 19, 2013
SITE: MOHEGAN SUN CASINO, UNCASVILLE, CONN.
DIVISION: LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT
WEIGHTS: KOVALEV 175; CAMPILLO 175
RING RATING (GOING INTO FIGHT): KOVALEV UNRATED; CAMPILLO NO. 3
NETWORK: NBC

Sergei Kovalev, a onetime amateur star from Russia, had been beating up far inferior opponents since turning pro in 2009. The question was this: How would he do when he stepped up to world-class competition? The answer: Incredibly well.

Kovalev overwhelmed Gabriel Campillo with controlled ferocity from the opening bell and didn't stop until the Spaniard had gone down three times in the third, which left referee Mike Ortega no choice but to end matters at 1:30 of a round that stunned both Campillo and those watching.

And make no mistake: Campillo (21-5-1, 8 knockouts) was no pushover. He was rated No. 3 by THE RING and entered the fight on something of a run in spite of a 2-2-1 record in his previous five fights, having been cheated out of victories over Beibut Shumenov and Tavoris Cloud in the opinion of many observers.

Many experts expected Campillo to win. Hence the surprise when he failed to survive three rounds.

Indeed, Kovalev (20-0-1, 18 KOs) proved that his combination of experience, tight technique and immense punching power can take down both journeymen and elite opponents. Seventeen of his knockout victims have now fallen inside three rounds, an eye-catching statistic.

"I didn't want this to go the distance," Kovalev said through an interpreter. "I didn't want anyone to say Campillo got robbed again like he did the other times. I wanted to show what I can do, and in the third round, with the one power punch, I saw I could hurt him."

Of course, one victory over a top-tier opponent doesn't make Kovalev a star even if he entered THE RING's light heavyweight ratings at No. 5. He has more to prove. At the same time, he earned the right to call out the best in the division.

Kovalev, who lives in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., mentioned the Bernard Hopkins-Tavoris Cloud winner, Chad Dawson and Nathan Cleverly.

"I would want the winner of the Cloud-Hopkins fight on March 9," he said. "I would fight anyone, but whether Cloud or Hopkins will fight me, I don't know. In boxing today, a lot of fighters are very protected. I think I have all of the tools to beat them. It depends on whether or not they accept it."

– Michael Rosenthal

Image: Chris Farina-Top Rank

Mikey Garcia (flanked by his father and brother, trainers Eduardo and Robert Garcia) served up a smile after beating Orlando Salido.

MIKEY GARCIA TD 8
ORLANDO SALIDO

DATE: JAN. 19, 2013
SITE: MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, NEW YORK
DIVISION: FEATHERWEIGHT
WEIGHTS: GARCIA 125½; SALIDO 126
RING RATING (GOING INTO FIGHT): SALIDO NO. 1; GARCIA NO. 3
NETWORK: HBO

Patience and stardom are an unlikely combination in the rush to get it all as fast as possible these days, but when they do get together, they look an awful lot like Mikey Garcia.

Garcia (31-0, 26 KOs) has a few other combinations as well. Orlando Salido (29-12-2, 27 KOs) saw a lot of them on his way to an eighth-round technical-decision loss, which gave Garcia THE RING featherweight championship and Salido's WBO belt.

But Garcia seemed disappointed that he couldn't show Salido or the crowd of 4,850 more. His nose had been broken by a head butt and the bout was turned over to the judges, who scored it widely in his favor 79-69, 79-69 and 79-70.

It was brilliant, yet it was only a beginning.

Garcia's star is rising at a time when the Manny Pacquiao generation has begun to recede. On a weekend when Kelly Pavlik announced his retirement, Garcia knocked down Salido four times with angles, footwork, precision and an almost instinctive sense of timing. Salido moved forward resolutely and always in a stubborn straight line, but Garcia was there to subtly turn him one way, then another. It was as if Garcia had him on an imaginary leash, leading him into traps that Salido could neither elude nor counter.

First, there was a one-two combo that dropped Salido about 90 seconds after the opening bell. Then, there was a left hook that dropped Salido for a second time as the first round ended. Garcia was just getting warmed up. Salido was back on the canvas midway through the third, thanks to a right uppercut from Garcia. In the early seconds of the fourth round, Garcia sent him there again with a left that landed stiffly and with the blunt impact of a bat thrown like a spear.

"I had the perfect fight going on," Garcia told the media at the post-fight news conference.

Salido said his nose was broken, too. He said he could have continued. He said Mexicans don't quit. He demanded a rematch, saying Garcia still had to prove he was a worthy champion. Maybe he tasted something on that canvas that causes amnesia.

Image: Naoki Fukuda

Gabriel Rosado (left) took everything Gennady Golovkin threw at him but couldn't overcome gushing blood.

Salido's two victories over Juan Manuel Lopez had worried Garcia's management. Manager Cameron Dunkin fretted that the 25-year-old might be getting ahead of himself. But Garcia, of Oxnard, Calif., has been perfecting his skills under the patient guidance of trainers Eduardo and Robert Garcia, who also happen to be his father and brother. He was waiting for the right place and right stage. New York and HBO were perfect. So was he.

"I told everybody it was just another fight for me," Garcia said. "I'm not so worried about what's at stake. I just want to show everybody the fighter I am."

– Norm Frauenheim

GENNADY GOLOVKIN TKO 7
GABRIEL ROSADO

DATE: JAN. 19, 2013
SITE: MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, NEW YORK
DIVISION: MIDDLEWEIGHT
WEIGHTS: GOLOVKIN 160; ROSADO 159
RING RATING (GOING INTO FIGHT): GOLOVKIN NO. 3; ROSADO NOT RATED
NETWORK: HBO

There has been no shortage of expectations surrounding Gennady Golovkin since late last year. Now, the task is to manage them, fashion a fighter that sustains the buzz, stays unbeaten and creates a potential reward worth the risk. Call it a blueprint for 2013, a business plan in progress.

So far, so good.

Golovkin (25-0, 22 KOs), the WBA middleweight titleholder, did what he had to with a TKO of a bloodied Rosado (21-6, 13 KOs), whose corner threw in the towel at 2:46 of the seventh round.

The lack of a knockout or even a knockdown left some questions about just how good Golovkin is or – more to the point – will be. Rosado, a Philadelphia fighter and as tough as advertised, entered the fight undersized and presumably overmatched.

Nevertheless, Rosado, who wound up with 13 stitches above the wounded eye, was able to keep Golovkin off balance in the early moments and even backed him up in the fourth.

"I wore him down in the fifth and sixth," Golovkin said at the post-fight news conference. "This was not a statement for me. But it was a win."

The flu might have had something to do with a Golovkin performance that didn't quite fulfill the expectations attached to the 2004 Olympic silver medalist from Kazakhstan. He was reportedly sick and in bed just two nights before the opening bell. Nobody knew about this until HBO's Max Kellerman asked him about it in the center of the ring immediately after the fight.

"It's true that I was sick, but there's no excuses," said Golovkin, who according to some reports might be offered a multi-fight deal by HBO.

The flu question generated some complaints from Rosado and others. Rosado called it "disrespectful" in an interview with RingTV.com.

"It was kind of lame for Max Kellerman to bring that up," Rosado said.

But it was neither disrespectful nor lame. It was news if Golovkin entered the ring drained after facing one foe, the flu, and then faced another, Rosado. Maybe Golovkin didn't easily knock out either. But the combination added up to adversity that might have undone a fighter with more modest expectations.

Golovkin said it best: Only a win mattered. The plan is for him to fight in late March, possibly in Germany, according to K2 managing director Tom Loeffler. As many as four fights are possible in 2013, Loeffler said.

If the business plan avoids another unplanned bout with the flu and adds three more wins, the Rosado fight will be remembered only for what it was expected to be: A Golovkin victory.

– Norm Frauenheim

NO. 1 TAKASHI UCHIYAMA TKO 8 NO. 10 BRYAN VAZQUEZ
DEC. 31, 2012, TOKYO

Takashi Uchiyama rang in the New Year with style, notching the sixth successful defense of his WBA 130-pound title with an eighth-round stoppage of Bryan Vazquez.

Uchiyama (19-0-1, 16 KOs) stalked Vazquez with left-hand leads and controlled the fight with his superior guile, power and athleticism before turning it on in the middle rounds. He began to dial in with power shots and then stunned Vazquez in the eighth with a barrage of punches that forced the 25-year-old to retreat and fall into the ropes. Vazquez covered up and offered no resistance as Uchiyama amped up the pressure and let his hands go.

Vazquez (29-1, 15 KOs) barely made it out of the round, but it was for naught, as referee Raul Caiz Jr. called it while the overwhelmed Costa Rican sat on his stool. At the time of the stoppage, Uchiyama was ahead on all three cards: 70-63, 69-64 and 68-65.

KAZUTO IOKA TKO 6 JOSE RODRIGUEZ
DEC. 31, 2012, OSAKA, JAPAN

Japanese prodigy Kazuto Ioka won a title in a second weight class in just his 11th pro contest, dropping Jose Rodriguez three times en route to a sixth-round stoppage for the vacant WBA junior flyweight belt.

Ioka dropped Rodriguez in the first with a left body shot, right uppercut combo. Rodriguez (28-2, 17 KOs) beat the count and rebounded with a strong fourth, but the end came two frames later.

It began as Ioka (11-0, 7 KOs) fired a left-right combination that floored and badly hurt Rodriguez. The stunned Mexican got up on wobbly legs and Ioka went in for the finish, drilling his foe senseless with a quick right body shot, right uppercut one-two. Referee Pinit Prayadsab was forced to halt the bout without a count at 2:50.

The 23-year-old, who was rated No. 1 by THE RING at 105 pounds, defended his WBC title three times and had just won the WBA belt at that weight before moving up to 108. He is quickly gaining recognition as one of the sport's rising stars.

NO. 7 RYO MIYAZAKI SD 12 PORNSAWAN PORPRAMOOK
DEC. 31, 2012, OSAKA, JAPAN

Ryo Miyazaki captured the vacant WBA 105-pound belt (the one vacated by Ioka), edging Pornsawan Porpramook by split decision. One judge scored it for Porpramook 114-113 while the other two had it for Miyazaki 116-111 and 116-112.

Porpramook (27-5-1, 17 KOs), best known for his slugfest with Akira Yaegashi in one of the best fights of 2011, employed his trademark whirlwind style. He kept the pressure on Miyazaki round after round, while Miyazaki, 24, sought to fend him off with jabs, quickness and sharp boxing.

The contrast in styles made for an entertaining fight and there were many shifts in momentum. In the fourth, Porpramook, 34, badly stunned Miyazaki (18-0-3, 10 KOs) and then continued to find his target in the fifth. The judges had the fight a draw after eight rounds, but Miyazaki prospered down the stretch. He cracked Porpramook with a left hook that wobbled the Thai fighter and had him out on his feet, but he made it to the final bell.

NO. 3 YOTA SATO UD 12 NO. 8 RYO AKAHO
DEC. 31, 2012, TOKYO

Yota Sato made the second successful defense of his WBC junior bantamweight title with a comprehensive decision victory over fellow countryman Ryo Akaho. The scores were 118-110, 117-112 and 117-111 for Sato.

Sato (26-2-1, 12 KOs) used his savvy boxing ability, speed and length to dictate the pace of the fight and keep Akaho at bay. He toyed with his opponent for much of the fight, even resorting to the rope-a-dope tactic in Round 9.

Akaho (19-1-2, 12 KOs) won a few rounds on pure aggression but simply couldn't cope with the larger and more technically sound fighter.

Sato hasn't lost since Sept. 2005 and has established himself as one of Japan's best fighters. He rose to No. 2 in the division with the one-sided victory.

KOHEI KONO TKO 4 NO. 2 TEPPARITH SINGWANCHA
DEC. 31, 2012, TOKYO

Kohei Kono sprung a major upset, winning the WBA 115-pound belt against prohibitive favorite Tepparith Singwancha with a fourth-round stoppage.

Kono (28-7, 11 KOs) dropped Singwancha (who fights under the name of his sponsor, Kokietgym) three times in the fourth round, signaling the conclusion of the contest due to the WBA's three knockdown rule. The first was the result of a devastating left hook that seemed to render the titleholder senseless. Singwancha (21-3, 13 KOs) got up but soon went down again after a series of Kono right hands. The Thai warrior barely beat the count but a final flurry from Kono ended the fight at 2:08, when referee Stanley Christodoulou waved it off.

Kono crashed THE RING's junior bantamweight ratings at No. 6, while Singwancha fell to No. 7. It was the Japanese fighter's first victory in a world title fight after two previous unsuccessful attempts.

JOHN MOLINA KO 4 DANNIE WILLIAMS
JAN. 11, 2013, SANTA FE, N.M. (ESPN2)

John Molina rebounded from the worst night of his professional career with a highlight reel knockout on *Friday Night Fights*, stopping Dannie Williams in the fourth round.

Williams (22-3, 18 KOs) built an early lead on the strength of his overhand rights but suffered a cut over his left eye after an accidental clash of heads in the third.

In the following frame, Molina landed a stiff jab and followed with an overhand right, which connected with Williams' temple and spun him to the canvas like a top. He lay with his head dangling over an official's table and got up on the other side of the apron as referee Rocky Burke reached the count of 10 at 2:16.

Molina (25-2, 20 KOs) was in dire need of a strong performance after his previous outing, a 44-second stoppage loss to Antonio DeMarco. He reestablished himself as a contender at 135 pounds with the rebound victory. Williams, who was once regarded as a promising prospect, suffered his second defeat in three fights.

RONNY RIOS UD 10 RICO RAMOS
JAN. 11, 2013, FANTASY SPRINGS CASINO, INDIO, CALIF. (SHOWTIME)

Graduation to world class will have to wait for Ronny Rios (20-0, 9 KOs). He's still a student. A promising one, to be sure. But a unanimous decision on *ShoBox* for the North American Boxing Federation's featherweight title over former World Boxing Association super-bantamweight champion Rico Ramos (21-2, 11 KOs) was full of mixed results that say his apprenticeship is unfinished.

"I gave myself only a C," Rios, 22, said after a slow-paced bout marked by sporadic exchanges.

Rios was rarely able to close the distance and make the more mobile Ramos fight for long. When he did, Rios scored with a body attack punctuated by a left hook. On the scorecards, it was 96-94, 97-93 and 100-90, all for Rios, whose grade from that third judge was more than he would even give himself.

NO. 3 ADRIAN HERNANDEZ UD 12 DIRCEU CABARCA
JAN. 12, 2013, TOLUCA, MEXICO

It was the first title fight of the New Year. It was also the first mismatch.

Adrian Hernandez (26-2-1, 16 KOs) retained the WBC junior flyweight title in his first defense against somebody who had never gone beyond eight rounds and had fought beyond his native Panama only once. Oh yeah, his name is Dirceu Cabarca (13-7, 5 KOs).

The WBC's Jose Sulaiman tried to explain why his acronym sanctioned the fight. He called it entertaining. Well, let's just say it went the distance with Hernandez winning 120-108, 118-110 and 119-112.

Hernandez, who might be headed to Japan in April for his next title defense, had Cabarca in trouble in the third with uppercuts and body shots. But Cabarca survived, in part because of a head butt that cut Hernandez near his left eye and at the bridge of his nose.

NO. 3 ROMAN MARTINEZ D 12 NO. 7 JUAN CARLOS BURGOS
JAN. 19, 2013, MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, NEW YORK (HBO)

Anybody up for a rematch?

It looks as if there will have to be one if only to sweep away the controversy that lingers on the scorecards after Burgos (30-1-1, 20 KOs) seemed to win, yet didn't, in a bid to take the WBO junior lightweight title away from Martinez (26-1-2, 16 KOs).

Burgos won the important punch-stat categories: 286-193 overall and 234-164 on power shots. On fan polls and message boards, public sentiment was with him. But judge Tony Paolillo wasn't, scoring for Martinez 116-112 despite body shots that landed and landed.

Listen carefully and you might hear another one land.

Judge Waleska Roldan did see them, scoring it for Burgos 117-111. John Signorile scored it a draw 114-114. Signorile might not have gotten it right but, officially, it is what it is – a split draw and an undisputed reason to do it again.

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Image: Naoki Fukuda

Anthony Ferrante (background) introduced then-unbeaten Isa Akberbayev to the canvas with one fight-ending punch in the 10th round on Jan. 19.

HEAVYWEIGHTS

OLEG MASKAEV KO 3 OWEN BECK
SOLOMON HAUMONO KO 5 KYOTARO FUJIMOTO
HECTOR AVILA KO 7 EMILIO ZARATE
DEONTAY WILDER KO 2 MATTHEW GREER

CRUISERWEIGHTS

ANTHONY FERRANTE KO 10 ISA AKBERBAYEV

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS

MOUNIR TOUMI W 10 TONY AVERLANT
THOMAS WILLIAMS JR. KO 3 JASON SMITH
HAKIM CHIOUI KO 3 PARFAIT TINDANI
ROBERTO BOLONTI KO 8 FRANCO SANCHEZ
SERGEI KOVALEV KO 3 GABRIEL CAMPILLO
SEAN MONAGHAN W 8 ROGER CANTRELL

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS

FRANCIS CHEKA W 12 CHIMWEMWE CHIOTCHA
MAXIM VLASOV W 10 GEARD AJETOVIC
BRANDON GONZALES W 8 DON MOUTON
RUBEN ACOSTA KO 7 EVERALDO PRAXEDES
HADILLAH MOHOUMADI W 10 CEDRIC BELLAIS
CALEB TRUAX W 10 MATT VANDA

MIDDLEWEIGHTS

JOE GREENE W 8 CALVIN ODOM
KARIM ACHOUR KO 5 MICHEL MOTHMORA
ELCO GARCIA KO 7 RAHMAN YUSUBOV
MARCUS UPSHAW KO 8 VLADINE BIOSSE
CURTIS STEVENS KO 1 ELVIN AYALA
GENNADY GOLOVKIN KO 7 GABRIEL ROSADO

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS

CHARLES WHITTAKER W 10 DONDON SULTAN
JONATHAN GONZALEZ W 10 DEREK ENNIS
DAQUAN ARNETT W 8 BRANDON QUARLES
MICHEL SORO W 12 KRIS CARSLAW
AKIO SHIBATA KO 8 TAKAYUKI HOSOKAWA
PATRICK TEIXEIRA KO 1 LUIS ACEVEDO
YUDEL JHONSON W 8 DASHON JOHNSON
GLEN TAPIA KO 2 AYI BRUCE

WELTERWEIGHTS

ASHLEY THEOPHANE KO 1 CHAUREMBO PALASA
FERNANDO ANGULO W 12 JUAN MANUEL BONANNI
FRANKIE GAVIN KO 7 JASON WELBORN

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS

REYES SANCHEZ KO 6 RAMIRO ALCARAZ
ROBERT FRANKEL TD 5 JERMAINE WHITE
PATOMSUK PATHOMPOTHONG W 12 TAKAMORI AKITA
JOHAN PEREZ MD 10 STEVE FORBES

LIGHTWEIGHTS

JOHN MOLINA KO 4 DANNIE WILLIAMS
FERNANDO SAUCEDO KO 7 EDILSON RIO
(F) DELFINE PERSOON W 10 ANITA TORTI
(F) LUCIA MORELLI W 10 ROLA EL HALABI
FERMIN DE LOS SANTOS MD 12 EDGAR RIOVALLE
LUIS ARCEO W 10 RICARDO DOMINGUEZ
MARTIN GETHIN KO 9 BEN MURPHY
MARVIN PETIT KO 1 JOEL DURAND

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS

TAKASHI UCHIYAMA KO 8 BRYAN VAZQUEZ
RANCES BARTHELEMY W 12 ARASH USMANEE
EDGAR PUERTA KO 8 ABRAHAM RODRIGUEZ
GUILLAUME FRENOIS W 12 ANTHONY ARIMANY
DANTE JARDON DQ 2 ADRIAN VERDUGO
SERGIO THOMPSON KO 5 MOISES CASTRO
ROMAN MARTINEZ SD 12 JUAN CARLOS BURGOS

FEATHERWEIGHTS

CIRILO ESPINO W 12 ADONES AGUELO
RONNY RIOS W 10 RICO RAMOS
ROBINSON CASTELLANOS KO 1 EDGAR RAMIREZ
MIKEY GARCIA TD 8 ORLANDO SALIDO

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS

ALI HALLAB KO 2 NIKOLOZ BERKATSASHVILI
MARTIN CASILLAS W 10 JUAN MONTES

BANTAMWEIGHTS

(F) IRMA GARCIA W 10 JANETH PEREZ
RANDY CABALLERO KO 4 LUIS MALDONADO
YOAN BOYEAUX W 10 KARIM GUERFI

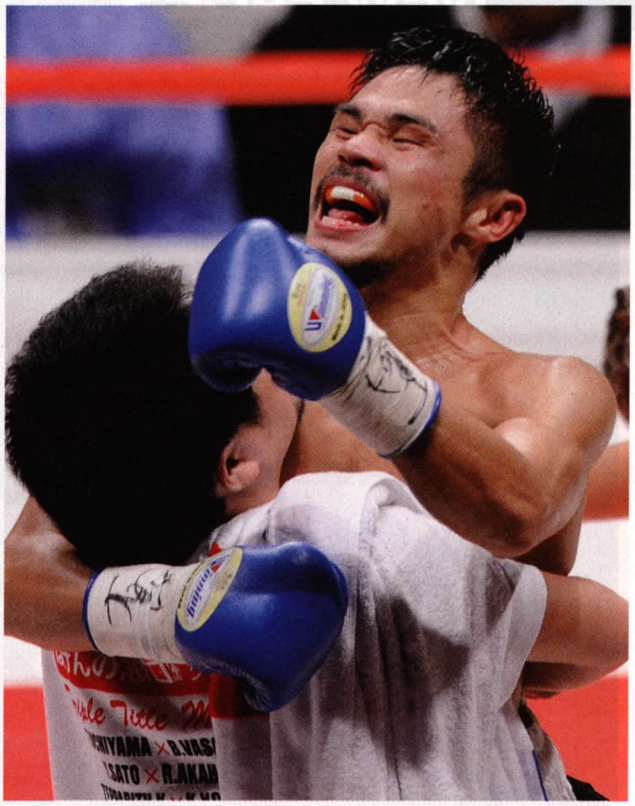

Image: Toru Yamanaka-AFP-Getty

Kohei Kono pulled a major upset by stopping Tepparith Singwancha to win the WBA 115-pound belt.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS

PETCH SOR CHITPATTANA W 10 FERNANDO OCON
OLEYDONG SITHSAMERCHAI W 6 DANILO PENA
YOTA SATO W 12 RYO AKAHO
KOHEI KONO KO 4 TEPPARITH SINGWANCHA
EFRAIN PEREZ KO 10 OMAR LINA
JASON CANOY KO 1 ARLON BATINGAL

FLYWEIGHTS

RYAN REY PONTERAS KO 4 RUSALEE SAMOR
AKIRA YAEGASHI KO 9 SAENMUANGLOEI KOKIETGYM
KWANPICHIT ONESONGCHAIGYM KO 4 NOLI MORALES

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS

KAZUTO IOKA KO 6 JOSE ALFREDO RODRIGUEZ
GANIGAN LOPEZ KO 3 JOSUE VEGA
SHIN ONO W 12 OMARI KIMWERI
ADRIAN HERNANDEZ W 12 DIRCEU CABARCA

STRAWWEIGHTS

RYO MIYAZAKI W 12 PORNSAWAN PORPRAMOOK

Image: Scott Heavey-Getty

Bryant Jennings (right, against Theron Johnson) is one of the United States' most-promising heavyweights.

BRYANT JENNINGS

By: **Bart Barry**

Philadelphia heavyweight Bryant Jennings talks to himself in the ring – even, or perhaps especially, when things are going well.

"One thing I practice is having that conversation with yourself," he says. "I do that with myself the whole fight. Keep myself aware, let myself know where I'm at."

Jennings initially developed this habit, along with his impressive physique, in football.

"When you get cracked," he says, "you got to get back on the line, and you don't want to let that fella on the other side know that you're all jacked up. You just keep talking to yourself."

Jennings is charismatic in a way Americans like their heavyweights, prizefighters who do not have to make weight through routine starvation and are expected to be approachable in a way opposite their menacing appearances. Any man who stands 6-foot-2, weighs 225 pounds and knows how to throw a punch from his shoulder, as Bryant quite evidently does, is dangerous, after all.

Bryant understands this and uses his size to set up observers before finishing them with friendliness.

"When I played basketball, I played basketball

very hard," he says, referring to his high school sports days. "They say, 'Man, this is the same guy who was doing all that crazy stuff on the basketball court?' They're checking out my body, they're checking out my physique. They say, 'Man, this guy is big as hell.' ... You know, I'm a nice guy. So when people see me, they see what I'm doing, they see me doing it at a level that's not common, and then my personality – it just tops everything off."

His fighting style is unusual because of its hybrid nature; Jennings moves in large circles in the early rounds, deciphers his opponents and then sits down on his punches and trades.

"I pretty much didn't try to model myself after too many people, as far as ability," he says of his influences, preferring instead to borrow accomplished heavyweights' best assets: "Muhammad Ali's ambition, or (Evander) Holyfield's will, and Mike Tyson's hunger."

At 28, Jennings is neither young for a prospect nor old for a heavyweight.

"(Boxing) kind of was just laid in my lap," he says about his start. "I stepped in the gym in January, and I was in the Golden Gloves Finals in May."

He also works full-time maintaining machinery at the Federal Reserve Bank in his native Philadelphia.

"I'm the youngest there, and I'm actually the biggest," he says. "It can get very tiring."

But after appearances on NBC Sports Network, Jennings now finds himself approaching a day when he can focus on boxing full-time.

"If I could devote all my time to boxing, I think about how much better that would make me as a fighter," he says about long days of training that follow longer days of work. "But right now, I've got to do what I've got to do. The money's tight. Boxing isn't that secure for me right now."

If Bryant Jennings can continue to improve with his competition – he has stopped three of his last four opponents, opponents with a combined record of 97-16-1 (68 KOs) – that will change very soon.

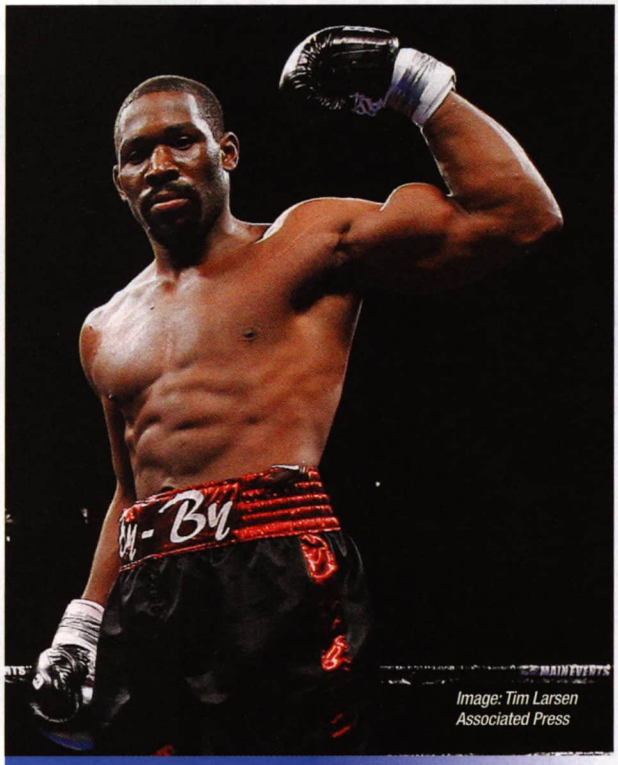

Image: Tim Larsen
Associated Press

BRYANT JENNINGS: THE ESSENTIALS

AGE: 28
HEIGHT: 6 feet, 2 inches
WEIGHT: 225 pounds
STANCE: Orthodox
TRAINER: Fred Jenkins Sr.
NICKNAME: By-By
HOMETOWN: Philadelphia
RECORD: 16-0 (8 KOs)

OTHERS TO WATCH

ALEX SAUCEDO (7-0, 5 KOs), WELTERWEIGHT

"El Cholo" made his pro debut at 17½ late in 2011 and had a terrific first year of prizefighting, winning six times – with five KOs – during a tour of Texas and his native Oklahoma. But the best harbinger of Saucedo's potential might be this: Matchmaker Bruce Trampler is ringside every time he fights.

RONALD ELLIS (7-0, 5 KOs), SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT

"Bad News" turned pro in early 2011 after a solid amateur career that peaked with a decision over 2012 U.S. Olympian Terrell Gausha in the 2010 National Golden Gloves finals. The rangy 23-year-old Miami native has a good jab, heavy hands and likes to mix it up, but he needs work on his technique. Trainer Robert Garcia should be able to polish him up.

DAQUAN ARNETT (10-0, 6 KOs), JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHT

The 20-year-old from Orlando, Fla., has pulled ahead of other young prospects by defeating unbeaten opponents in his last two bouts. The Al Haymon-managed, Tony Morgan-trained boxer is a fast and aggressive combination and body puncher, but his defense needs work.

Image: Toru Yamanaka-AFP-Getty

Straight punches, like the one Takashi Uchiyama lands here against Bryan Vasquez, can prevent hand injuries.

STRAIGHT PUNCHES CAN SAVE HANDS

By: **T.K. Stewart**

What can a boxer do without the benefit of two good hands? The simple answer is not much. It turns out that a prizefighter's two most valuable assets are healthy fists.

Fighters with hand injuries should come as no surprise. It only stands to reason that when fist meets skull repeatedly at high speed that the 27 tiny bones of the hand will eventually end up damaged.

Boxers from John L. Sullivan to Muhammad Ali to Floyd Mayweather Jr. have all suffered problems. During his career, Sullivan broke his hands several times; Ali was known to have had Novocain injections prior to bouts; Mayweather actually slumped to the canvas in pain after landing a punch during his bout with Jesus Chavez.

But there are methods to decrease the discomfort. And if punches are properly thrown and targeted, the damage can be minimized.

"The worst thing a boxer can do is swing wildly, instead of throwing a straight punch," said Rafael Garcia, whom Mayweather credits with saving his hands and his career as a result of his expert hand wrapping techniques. "When a fighter swings, he doesn't know where his punch is going to land. He

can't turn his hand so the knuckles land first. He ends up landing with the side of his hand or his thumb or his first knuckle. If you swing, you end up hitting an elbow, or on top of the head.

"Straight punches are the best, or the hook. The straight punches and the hook let your knuckles land squarely."

It is generally understood that the punch which affords the least chance of injury to the hand is the one that does the most damage to the opponent.

"If the knuckles land squarely ... the strain is spread out from the first to the last one equally there is little chance of injury and this is the type of punch that causes knockouts," Garcia said. "It should be the first type of punch that a young boxer learns to throw because it is the type of punch that does the work. It has to become habit that the knuckles land first."

Boxing history is replete with examples of fighters who threw straight, accurate, precision punches. Jack Johnson and Joe Louis are among those who did not swing wildly. Their punches were straight and usually to the mark, and as a result they scored many knockouts and suffered from very few hand injuries. Today, Wladimir Klitschko is a stand-up fighter who throws straight punches and avoids damage to his own fists.

"A straight punch gets to the target faster" said trainer Miguel Diaz, who has worked with a plethora of world champions. "The trouble with a lot of guys today is that they close their eyes and swing instead of looking at where they are punching. You hit an elbow you can break your hand. You hit on top of the head, you break your hand. If you land a nice body shot, that's no problem. If you hit someone straight on the chin, that's no problem either."

Dr. Steven Margles, a hand specialist who has repaired the dukes of Vinny Pazienza, Micky Ward and Paulie Malignaggi, concurs with Garcia and Diaz.

"The danger lies in wild punching," Margles said. "An amateur boxer fracture will typically be to the ring finger and pinky. These guys are having problems between their base and the second and third metacarpals because they throw punches improperly but with authority. A boxer that punches properly should hit with the index and middle fingers, which are anatomically very stable. All power generated there gets translated up the forearm bone."

If a fighter does not learn proper punching technique in the beginning, he will likely always have problem hands.

"If more attention were paid to learning to punch correctly, with clenched fists and on a direct line, there would be less work for the surgeons," Margles said. "Sooner or later the hand won't stand the strain, and the fighter won't be able to properly make a fist and when that happens there will be major implications." ■

TIME FOR CHANGE?

SOME WOMEN WANT THREE-MINUTE ROUNDS TO BE THE NORM

Image: Chris Cozzone

Chevelle Hallback (right, against Holly Holm) believes two-minute rounds disrupt the flow of fights.

By: **Ryan Songalia**

The object of boxing remains the same regardless of gender: subdue your opponent with your mind and two fists. Male and female combatants assume the same risks. The primary difference remains the amount of time they fight: Men fight at three-minute intervals for as many as 12 rounds; women's matches generally top out at 10 rounds of two minutes each even though those limitations can be flexible.

It's a polarizing issue. Some abhor the differences, some support them.

WBA junior middleweight titleholder Layla McCarter has been one of the most vocal proponents of gender equality in boxing. She's a pioneer in that regard. Her 2006 bout with Belinda Laracuente in Las Vegas was the first women's title fight to feature three-minute rounds. The following year, also in Las Vegas, she fought Donna Biggers in the first women's bout scheduled for 12 three-minute rounds.

McCarter feels it's a matter of legitimizing the sport.

"It was a policy deemed necessary by the powers that be to 'protect' women and their inferior bodies. Same sexist song," said McCarter, a 15-year ring veteran with a record of 35-13-5 (8 knockouts). "Apparently the fact the we have female parts and periods negates the fact that we have arms, legs, lungs, brains and 98 percent the same s--- as men have."

Former champ Chevelle Hallback, who has fought a who's-who of women's boxing talent in her 14 years in the ring, also supports longer rounds for women. She feels that the two-minute rounds disrupt the flow of the fight.

"We train three minutes in the gym, but when we get to the fights,

Image: Chris Cozzone

Layla McCarter (right, after a victory over Dominga Olivo) has been one of the most-vocal proponents of gender equity in boxing.

the difference messes up your timing and your rhythm," said Hallback (28-8-2, 11 KOs). "We don't have the time to show our skills as boxers; we're just put out there to throw our hands to get points or try to get a knockout within the time allotted for us. Why can't we fight three minutes to be able to show that our skills are on the same level as the guys?"

Hallback and McCarter, as well as retired featherweight Bonnie Canino, have reached out to commissions and sanctioning bodies seeking parity with the men. McCarter has had success with Nevada officials, who allowed her to take part in the ground-breaking fights in 2006 and 2007. Meanwhile, Hallback says that officials with the Association of Boxing Commissions have assured her that two-minute rounds are not set in stone. They are merely a suggestion.

Still, most women's bouts feature two-minute rounds.

No one seems to know exactly when two-minute rounds became the norm. However, Pennsylvania boxing commissioner Greg Sirb, who was on the original ABC committee to discuss the unified rules in the early '90s, says that the rule was adapted from earlier commission practices. Sirb says that if both fighters agree and have a reputation of professional competence, there would likely be no objections to them fighting three-minute rounds.

Nevada State Athletic Commission Executive Director Keith Kizer feels that the two-minute rounds standard "probably holds back the sport," but he allows for the option of fighting either two or three minutes per round, with championship fights being either 10 or 12 rounds.

"We do allow it because it's so common but if a woman wants to fight three-minute rounds we will allow them," Kizer said. "It's no different than male fighters, but most female fighters still train two minutes and prefer fighting two minute rounds.

Indeed, not all female boxers are on board with change. Some, like New York-based contender Maureen Shea and former titleholder Ana Julaton, who lives in the California Bay Area, are just fine with two-minute rounds.

"We're not going to make any more money to fight three-minute rounds," said Shea (18-2, 11 KOs). "The promoter's going to say 'We're going to pay you $200 a round,' then all of a sudden they're going to change it to three-minute rounds and say 'OK, now we're going to pay you $300 a round'? That's not going to happen."

Shea also points out that fewer and shorter rounds limit "wear and tear" on boxers, allowing them to fight more frequently.

Julaton (12-3-1, 2 KOs) feels a faster pace in two-minute rounds makes for more exciting fights, but would be OK with fighting three minutes under the right circumstances. "Obviously I think women can train and fight under those conditions," Julaton says. "If three minutes are going to give women a bigger stage, more media attention or even pay more, then I say let's go for the three minutes. But if not, then stick with the two minutes. I think a lot of the women are used to that pace. I think it's a faster pace. I feel it's more of a sprint. You don't have that extra minute to set things up. You have to think on your feet and act."

Hallback understands Julaton's sentiment but believes that improvements will come with change.

"We feel that if we have an equal playing field, maybe we'll have the same opportunities to fight on HBO and generate at least half the money that the men make," she said. "In order to generate more money for the females and to fight on the networks, we have to start somewhere." ■

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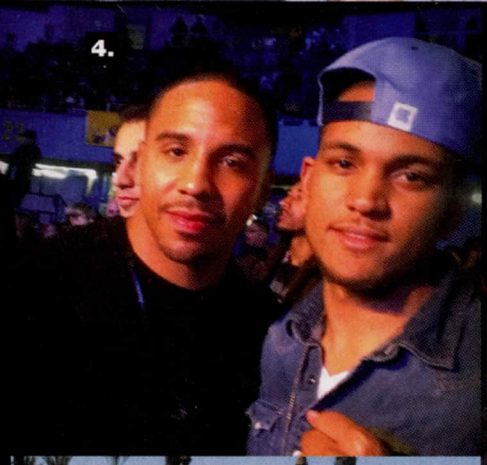
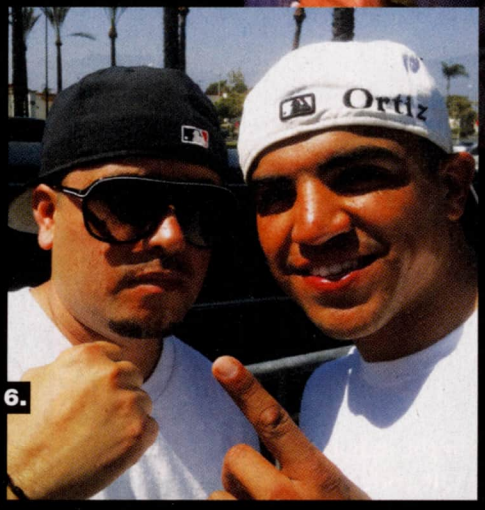
GREAT MEETS GREAT: Thomas Hearns (right) had already emerged as a knockout sensation when he had the chance to meet Sugar Ray Robinson in 1979 but his greatest challenges lay ahead, including a fateful meeting with another Sugar Ray in 1981. Robinson and Hearns are considered two of best who ever lived.

THE RING will select a photo from its vast archive each month to publish in the magazine. For more archive photos, go to our Web site — RingTV.com — or scan the QR code.

1. Adrien Broner with Jordan Zazueta, 10, at the Amir Khan-Carlos Molina fight in December 2012 in Los Angeles. 2. Patrick McGrath (right) with Ray Mercer at Graziano's restaurant during the 2012 International Boxing Hall of Fame induction weekend in Canastota, N.Y. 3. Vassili Ossipov (right) with Nonito Donaire at a press conference to promote the Donaire-Omar Narvaez fight in 2011 in New York. 4. Juan Siler Jr. (right) with Andre Ward at the Khan-Molina fight. 5. Ian Raymond (left) with Paulie Malignaggi at the Lamont Peterson-Khan fight in 2011 in Washington, D.C. 6. Chris Zazueta (left) with Victor Ortiz during the promotional tour for the Ortiz-Floyd Mayweather Jr. fight in 2012.





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